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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

OCTOBER 2005

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 110

OCTOBER 2005

No. 10

## Traditional Wisdom

SAJJANATĀ: GOODNESS

करे श्लाघ्यस्त्यागः शिरसि गुरुपादप्रणयिता मुखे सत्या वाणी विजयिभुजयोर्वीर्यमतुलम् ।  
हृदि स्वस्था वृत्तिः श्रुतमधिगतेकव्रतफलं विनाप्यैश्वर्येण प्रकृतिमहतां मण्डनमिदम् ॥

Hands famed for charity, the head crowned with love for the guru's feet, the mouth adorned with truthful speech, arms bearing invincible strength, and the heart set on single-minded pursuit of scriptural wisdom—these are the ornaments of the noble ones even when they are bereft of all other wealth.

ये दीनेषु दयालवः स्पृशति यान्त्योऽपि न श्रीमदो व्यग्रा ये च परोपकारकरणे हृष्यन्ति ये याचिताः ।  
स्वस्थाः सन्ति च यौवनोन्मदमहाव्याधिप्रकोपेऽपि ये तैः स्तम्भैरिव सुस्थितैः कलिभरक्लान्ता घरा धार्यते ॥

Those who are kind to the poor, whom pride of wealth does not touch, who are eager to help others, are pleased when sought for help, and who remain unafflicted when the dreadful disease of youthful arrogance is upon them—by such beings, steady as rocks, is this earth, oppressed by Kali (Yuga), held together.

घृष्टं घृष्टं पुनरपि पुनश्चन्दनं चारुगन्धं छिन्नं छिन्नं पुनरपि पुनः स्वादु चैवेक्षुकाण्डम् ।  
दग्धं दग्धं पुनरपि पुनः काञ्चनं कान्तवर्णं न प्राणान्ते प्रकृतिविकृतिजायते चोत्तमानाम् ॥

Just as sandalwood, though rubbed time after time, remains fragrant; just as sugarcane, though chopped into pieces, remains sweet; just as gold, despite being heated again and again, retains its dazzle—even so does the nature of the great remain unchanged, even in the face of death.

Those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened never make a false step. ... They are so full of love of God that whatever action they undertake is a good action. (Sri Ramakrishna)

All mankind stands in reverence before the man who is ready to sacrifice himself for others. (Swami Vivekananda)

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## ∞ This Month ∞

The starkly inhuman facets of the human personality as well as the appalling depth and extent of human suffering have not only posed a perpetual challenge to theologians and natural philosophers but have also engaged brilliant individuals in attempts at transcendence. The editorial, **Encountering Evil**, takes an impressionistic view of the issues concerned.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** dwells on the achievements of contemporary Japan, including its remarkable progress, both in war and in peace.

Leibniz coined the term *theodicy* (from Greek *theos*, god, and *dike*, justice) for theological attempts to solve the problem of evil. Dr Radharani P, Lecturer in Philosophy, Kariavattom, Kerala, analyses a representative sample of these theodicies, from the perspectives of both Western and Eastern thinkers, in her article **The Fact and Mystery of Evil**.

In Socrates' opinion, there is only one good—knowledge, and one evil—ignorance. This is also the conclusion reached by the Advaita Vedanta and Yoga schools. Swami Satyanandanaji examines the mental transformations that lead to knowledge in the light of yoga and the rationale behind this transcendence in his essay **Deliverance from Evil**. The author is a monastic member of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Stress, both physical and psychological, is one of the leading causes of disease and incapacity in contemporary society and the ubiquitous search for a remedy is testified to by the host of best-sellers addressing the subject. **Living with Tension** is a succinct

summary of guidelines that can help one manage the tensions of daily life. Sri Dibakar Chakrabarti, the author, is a senior administrator who was Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Government of Tripura.

The non-violent social order or Sarvodaya Samaj envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi called for strict moral discipline, and Gandhiji, in pursuance of this goal, worked out the social implications of the five cardinal moral principles (yamas) in detail. **Social Implications of the Cardinal Vows and Peace: A Gandhian Perspective** is a well-researched paper on this theme by Dr T Suseela of the Department of Philosophy, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, and is co-authored by Dr S Abdul Sattar, Associate Professor in the same department.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute**, is a newly formed deemed university (under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act 1956) under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Mission with headquarters at Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal. In this number we present a concept paper which briefly describes the institute, its aims and objectives, its distinctive features, and the major thrust of its policies.

In the second instalment of his survey of the history of the record of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, Swami Chetanandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, presents a study of **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to Suresh Chandra Datta**.

This month's **Glimpses of Holy Lives** introduces the fascinating character of Sadhu Kishandasji, a Vaishnava saint of Vrindaban.

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# Encountering Evil

## EDITORIAL

### Hard Facts

**M**ansukhbhai was an affluent businessman of the town of Bhuj in Gujarat. Hard work, pragmatism, and a shrewd business sense helped him set up a flourishing business in textiles. On 26 January 2001, Mansukhbhai was out for a stroll in the bazaar when a powerful earthquake rocked Bhuj. His multi-storeyed house that had been a landmark in Bhuj was razed to the ground. None of the members of his extended family survived the catastrophe. Rummaging through the ruins of his residence, Mansukhbhai kept crying aloud, 'Why was I spared?'

Bijoy is an exceptional member of the Jamatia tribe in Tripura. He has consistently worked for cultural rapprochement between the tribal and non-tribal populations locked in a never-ending spiral of conflict and violence. Unfortunately, the bus in which his wife and son were travelling from their tribal hamlet to the town of Agartala was waylaid by a mob bent on wreaking vengeance on the tribals. Both mother and son were singled out by appearance and hacked to death. Bijoy is stunned. He can only mumble, 'Why should this happen to me?'

Varun was born to Lakshmi and Ramesh after they had spent long years fasting and praying for a child. But Varun has been a sickly child. Recent blood tests have revealed a rare form of cancer that he is unlikely to survive. The parents are inconsolable. 'What wrong has this child done to suffer such a fate?' they ask.

The questions posed by Mansukhbhai, Bijoy, Lakshmi and Ramesh are not mere epigrammatic expressions of personal anguish; they are reverberant echoes of eternal questions expressive of the paradox of the human

situation. For although we take joy and hope to be synonymous with life, pain, affliction, evil and injustice regularly impinge on our lives to shock us out of such notions.

### The Problem

The pursuit of happiness is a basic teleological urge motivating all human behaviour. The reveller in the streets, the scientist involved in cutting-edge research, the connoisseur of art and the meditation adept, each derives immediate or prospective pleasure from his or her specific engagement—physical, intellectual, emotional or spiritual. But that pleasure is never unmixed. In its classificatory scheme of happiness (*sukha*) based on the three *gunas*, the *Bhagavadgita*<sup>1</sup> tells us that *sāttvika sukha* is a result of prolonged, repeated and taxing effort that matures into a psycho-physical state of joyous equanimity (*abhyāsād ramate yatra duḥkhāntaṁ ca nigacchati*). All higher forms of pleasure are defined by this category. Sensual pleasure, on the other hand, is *rājasika* and is characterized by an immediate sense of gratification. This satisfaction is not only transient but ends up in misery for reasons that we shall soon discuss. The third category of *tāmasika sukha* is delusion of happiness (*sukham mohanam ātmanah*). The lazy and the callous, whose only source of happiness lies in 'sleeping it off', comprise this category of *tāmasika* people, and their number is by no means insubstantial.

The bottom line of this categorization is the fact that unalloyed joy in the phenomenal world is a chimera. This realization had dawned on humanity as an inescapable fact early in its civilizational march. On the one hand, it impelled people into the struggle for material betterment, and on the other, it turned them to



that introspective reflection which blossomed into the religious impulse, a defining characteristic of humanity.

Personal tragedy has always appealed to popular imagination as an essential ingredient for the generation of *vairagya*, the basic mood for spiritual inquiry. This theme has found expression not only in classical myths and legends (Dhruva's quest for God as depicted in the Bhagavata and the episode of Suratha and Samadhi in the *Durgā Saptasatī* being typical examples) but also in the works of modern litterateurs like Tagore and Tolstoy. Romantic imagination may not be veridical in its representation of the realities of mundane existence, but the fact remains that even in orthodox Vedantic tradition a keen awareness of suffering and sorrow is an important desideratum for the aspirant's turning to the apophatic path of *nivṛtti*.

The typical Vedantic imagery for the harsh reality of phenomenal existence is that of *tritāpa*, the triple fires that inexorably scorch the psychophysical organism, the *jīva*. These comprise the *ādhyātmika* ills and afflictions arising from one's own constitution—the physical and psychological illnesses and incapacities that none can escape, the *ādhibhautika* conflicts that are an inescapable part of interpersonal relations and social interaction, and the *ādhidaiivika* disasters that visit humans in the form of natural calamities born of brute and insentient environmental forces.

The concept of *ādhyātmika tāpa* translates into the equally picturesque imagery of the *ṣaḍ-ūrmi*,<sup>2</sup> the sixfold waves that lash the mind, the prana (human energy system), and the physical frame in the form of grief and delusion (*śoka-moha*), hunger and thirst (*kṣudhā-triśnā*), and birth and death (*janma-mṛtyu*) respectively.

The message these similes wish to drive home is clear: affliction and sorrow are inextricable existentials woven into the very fabric of life. Maharshi Patanjali has, in one of his Yoga sutras, summarized the reasons why this

should be so. He says that because of the presence of perpetual flux in the *citta* (mind stuff), as also the presence of painful experiences and their karma-residues (or *samskaras*), and because the three *gunas*, the primary constituents of the mind, are in a state of perpetual mutual opposition (leading to a shifting dynamic equilibrium), to the discriminative mind, all of phenomenal existence is productive of pain; *pariṇāma-tāpa-samskāra duḥkhaiḥ guṇa-vṛtti virodhāt ca duḥkham eva sarvaṁ vivekinaḥ*.<sup>3</sup> To translate this into modern scientific idiom, the very structure of the psychoneural apparatus of humans (and for that matter, of all living beings) allows for the primacy of pain or nociception.

From the evolutionary perspective, awareness of pain and the ability to move away from noxious stimuli is an absolute necessity for the survival of a species. Hence this function is present in rudimentary form even in unicellular organisms like the amoeba. Even in higher animals with a well-developed nervous system and greater voluntary control, the response to noxious stimuli is primarily mediated by an involuntary neural reflex arc that allows for withdrawal of the affected part in a split second, as when we inadvertently touch a heated iron rod. The crucial survival advantage offered by this mechanism is brought home by the disabilities of persons with impaired pain sensation. For instance, leprosy patients with loss of pain sensation in their limbs quickly tend to lose their digits, eroded by the pressures involved in routine manual work, once the protective effect of pain awareness is removed.

If normal awareness of pain has a protective function, unusually painful stimuli can leave strong subconscious impressions (*duhkha samskara*) which can remarkably affect our conscious functioning. Anxiety and phobia are extreme examples of this (often maladaptive) response.

Besides the fact that it is being constantly bombarded by sensory stimuli, the mind, by

virtue of its being cogitative in function, is in a state of perpetual flux. Again, the *citta* in itself lacks any mechanism for the selection of thoughts (the *citta vṛtti*). So contrary and competing thoughts and ideas keep constantly rising in the mind allowing no peace or tranquillity, the basic prerequisites of joy. Thus a basic tension is involved in our psychoneural functioning that prevents a natural perception of the bliss that is the very nature of our spiritual Self, the Atman.

A rather dreary picture appears to be emerging and the realistic reader is bound to ask if things are, in truth, all that bad. After all, we all have our own personal joys and delights, our fair share of good times of fun and merriment. Anticipating this charge, Patanjali has introduced a key term in his sutra, *vivekināḥ*, 'to the discriminative intellect'. A keen awareness of human misery comes only to persons with a discriminative intellect, who have learnt to be keenly perceptive, and also have the insight to judge the reality behind facades. The commentator, Maharshi Vyasa, likens such individuals to the eyeball (*akṣipātra kalpo hi vidvān*), sensitive to the tiniest of specks that may accidentally land on its surface. Most of us hardly qualify for that appellation of *vidvān*, cocooned as we are in our own narrow world of shallow perceptions, blinkered vision, and unimaginative thinking. Hence not only do we remain quite satisfied with our present lot, but positively revel in it. The *Yoga Sutra* terms this state of affairs *avidyā*—the characterization of the transient, the impure, the painful and the non-Self as permanent, pure, joyous and the Self, respectively; *anitya āsuci duḥkha anātmasu nitya śuci sukha ātma khyātiḥ avidyā* (ibid., 2.5).

Perceptive minds are less under the sway of *avidyā* and hence have a better appreciation of reality. A petulant rebuke from a doted wife set Tulsidas's mind forever on Rama. Gautama Buddha's brief encounter with disease, decrepitude, senility and death was enough to turn him away from the pleasures

of his palace once and for all. These legends may appear to be what they actually are—mere myths—but they are based on sound psychological principles.

Buddha's explication of the Four Noble Truths (Arya Satya)—the existence of sorrow, *tanhā* or desire being the cause of sorrow, the possibility of the cessation of sorrow, and the Eightfold Path as the way out of sorrow—may justly be termed a new discovery. None had explicitly formulated these facts in such comprehensive manner prior to Buddha. If the Upanishads make passing references to the problem of suffering,<sup>4</sup> in the Buddhist discourse it is given a foundational status. The transitoriness of phenomena (*anicca*), the presence of suffering (*dukkha*) and the illusory nature of the ego (*anāṭta*) are the basic principles that the Buddhist texts never tire of expatiating upon. In fact it was this emphasis on suffering that gave rise to the negative stereotype of Oriental pessimism vis-a-vis Occidental activism in the works of nineteenth-century Orientalists.

Stereotypes are usually a travesty of truth. To see only the universality of suffering and not the emphatic statement of its transcendence in the Arya Satyas is to miss out completely on Buddha's remarkable effort to find a solution to the problem of suffering. Conversely, to equate activism and busyness with happiness is to mistake the mask for reality. A keen and pervasive sense of the tragic in the literature generated in the Western hemisphere belies the said stereotype. The Greek myths about the tragic dynasties of Minos (in Crete), Atreus (in Mycenae), Cadmus (in Thebes), and Erichthonius (in Athens) as also the pessimistic vein of the *Iliad* underline this fact. These writings remind us that though the Greeks were tough, restless, ambitious and feisty as a race, these very qualities turned into common human weaknesses of overweening pride, rashness, ruthlessness, stubbornness and sexual conflict, which often led to disaster. Nordic mythology also projects a stern

and gloomy view of the cosmos and man's role in it, not unlike the hard, gloomy, cold and bitter environment in which the protagonists found themselves. Nevertheless, Norsemen were a fierce and hard-headed race who derived intense pleasure from such things as 'friendship, drinking and eating, making love, outwitting strangers, avenging wrongs, and fighting bravely'. This ambivalence remains a fundamental human trait. Behind the restless activity and the sense of fun and enjoyment that marks our civilization there often lies a deep sense of despondency and insecurity, and an inexpressible awareness of the tragic streak cutting across human life. Existentialist writers like Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Dostoevsky have especially dwelt on this fact.

### The Denouement

If its predicament appears irredeemable, humanity, for one, would not accept things as they are. The Bengali poet-saint Ramprasad has figuratively expressed this paradox in one of his popular songs which Sri Ramakrishna was especially fond of:

Prasad is afloat and people laugh—  
(What folly) to attempt swimming  
across the sea!

My mind agrees, but the heart does not  
The moon it sure must catch,  
a pygmy though it be!

The head and the heart are the instruments of human response to the problems of life. The head is synonymous with the rational aspect in humans while the heart represents both the emotional and the (often non-rational) intuitive elements in the personality. The interrogative 'why' is the archetypal symbol of reason, but the language of the heart is more volitional than verbal, its experience more subjective and ineffable.

Modern historians take the European Enlightenment as ushering in the 'Age of Reason', but the proposition is somewhat misleading. Rationality has always characterized humanity. Logic and philosophy had reached

sophisticated heights in the ancient and medieval worlds as is evident in the works of the Indian Naiyayikas and *bhāṣyakāras* as also those of the ancient Greek thinkers. What distinguished the Enlightenment was the pervasive and persistent questioning of cherished assumptions, the large-scale deployment of empiricism and positivism with their emphasis on experimentation, and the bold yet judicious use of inductive reasoning to arrive at universal laws from a limited set of observations. It is, in fact, empiricism that is the hallmark of modern science rather than rationality. Gravity, for instance, has been carefully studied and defined as an attractive force proportional to mass, but there is no good 'reason' why gravity should be the way it is.

When reason is confronted with the problem of pain and sorrow the response is twofold, quite analogous to the pre- and post-Enlightenment thinking—the philosophical and the scientific. The positivist locates the cause of suffering in observable phenomena. Diseases have specific aetiology, interpersonal conflicts and problems in social interaction also have identifiable causes as do the environmental changes that affect human well-being and comfort. But these explanations hardly ever satisfy the ill-fated individual gripped in the vice of suffering. Elaborate socio-political theories of ethnic conflict are not what Bijoy Jamatia is seeking when he asks the question, Why? Nor are Lakshmi and Ramesh asking for the molecular genetic basis of their child's cancer. They are looking beyond scientific explanations into the meaning of things. They are not merely interested in the *ādhyātmika* and *ādhibhautika* aspects of their problems but are seeking answers at a deeper, existential level, in the *ādhidaiivika* realm.

The rational quest for meaning has primarily centred around issues of 'justification'. This has included justification of humanity's claim to divine beneficence as well as the vindication of divine providence vis-a-vis the existence of evil. Pain and sorrow are quintes-

sential evils. Their existence is a paradox that has perpetually confounded humanity. How does one explain their presence in a creation supposedly the work of an all-wise and all-powerful God? How are they compatible with our notion of an all-merciful and loving God? Do they not subvert our ideas of natural as well as divine justice, especially when we can see no good reason for our suffering? These questions have been of crucial importance to the development of various dogmatic theologies and the multifarious theodicies associated with different religions. They are also central to the way common men and women conceive their Godhead, the universe they live in, and the interrelationship involved therein.

The attempts at resolution of this paradox of evil have taken various forms. The typical dualistic response has been the reification of evil into the Devil, Shaitan, Ahriman, Papa-purusha and the like. The human personality is thus rendered a constant battleground for the forces of good and evil, the human mind ending up as both the captive and the casualty dependent on divine grace for freedom and felicity. To the monistic and non-theistic traditions (Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism being the respective prototypes) good and evil are relative as well as subjective concepts (for example, the ultimate sorrow in death is cause for rejoicing to the martyrs), and joy and sorrow are structured into the very fabric of samsara, or phenomenal existence. So personification of good and evil into deities and demons is not mandatory for an understanding of these concepts within these traditions.

The question of justice presupposes personal responsibility and freedom of choice. In dualistic-theistic traditions, suffering is an agency for divine retribution, while the non-theists posit the natural justice involved in the cycle of karma and *karmaphala* (voluntary action and inevitable effects). Closely linked to this law of karma is reincarnation as an explanation for phenomena that are other-

wise inexplicable on the basis of a single life experience. Traditions that do not accept reincarnation may invoke transpersonal forces to explain such phenomena. The Christian concept of original sin that afflicts all humanity, thus alienating it from God and inducing evil action, is one such concept.

Unfortunately, the semblance of meaning that these philosophies and theologies offer is but a poor consolation to the grief-stricken hearts of Mansukhbhai and others, for the heart knows no reason. All it can do is feel. When wounded, it needs a healing touch. Take the case of the old village woman of Jayrambati who somehow eked out a living as a labourer after the demise of her young son, who had been her support in old age. One day she happened to carry some groceries to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's house. In answer to Holy Mother's query she announced her bereavement. An anguished cry of grief instantly escaped Mother's lips, and her eyes were filled with tears. The old woman, touched by Mother's empathy, also burst into tears. After a while, the common grief having been assuaged by mutual sharing, Mother rose to get some oil for the dry and dishevelled hair of the old labourer. She also tied some foodstuff to her sari and sent her home with her heart at peace.<sup>5</sup>

This incident requires no commentary. Nor can any amount of philosophizing capture the essence of the silent exchange that set at rest a grieving heart. The heart has its own language, to which alone it can respond. However, one must not assume that the heart represents soft emotions alone. It is also the abode of Shakti, the source of all power, strength and courage. These again are virtues antonymous to all forms of grief. Let us have a look at Manimohan Mallick's story. He had rushed to Sri Ramakrishna with a heavy heart soon after the death of a son. After he had heard of Mani Mallick's plight and silently listened to the words of consolation offered by the assembled gathering, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly

stood up, took the stance of a wrestler, and started singing:

O man, prepare for battle,  
There, see Death entering your house  
in battle array ...

The tune of the song, expressing great vigour, and the appropriate gesture coupled with the spirit of heroic renunciation and strength coursing from the Master's eyes, produced in the hearts of all a current of wonderful hope and energy. The heart of everyone was raised from the realm of grief and delusion ... Manimohan too felt it in his heart, forgot the agonizing grief, and was now calm, grave, and in perfect peace.<sup>6</sup>

A far more radical approach to sorrow and misery is offered by the goddess Kali, whose name spells terror, whose very breath is death, and who with 'every shaking step destroys a world for e'er'.<sup>7</sup> Kali is the Mother, the guardian of her children, the bestower of boons and blessings, and the guide to the highest good. If she symbolizes death and destruction, it is to her that we must turn, it is she whom we must love. As Swami Vivekananda pointed out:

Who dares misery love,  
And hug the form of Death,  
Dance in Destruction's dance,  
To him the Mother comes (ibid.)

Fear of the unknown is the mother of all fears. Much of our anxiety and dread pertains to things and events of which we have no good knowledge. Looking these fears squarely in the face can often make them vanish into thin air, or at least make them appear less formidable. The story of Swami Vivekananda's confrontation with an irate bunch of monkeys during his itinerant days in Varanasi is the perennial favourite as an illustration of this point. The herd had melted away as soon as he had faced up to them. Referring to this incident in a New York lecture years later, he ob-

served: 'That is a lesson for all life—face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them. If we are ever to gain freedom, it must be by conquering nature, never by running away.'<sup>8</sup>

Even in our more mundane moments, sorrow is a great benefactor. It is sorrow that spontaneously collects our scattered minds and it is in sorrow that we usually turn Godward. Moreover, it is the contrite heart that is graced by God. It is for these reasons that Swami Vivekananda, echoing Mother Kunti, once prayed: 'Lord, place me in a position where all others may criticize and abuse me, so that all my heart, mind, and love may turn to you alone.'<sup>9</sup>

Suffering may well be the remedy for evil. \*

## References

1. Bhagavadgita, 18. 36-9.
2. *Vivekachudamani*, 256.
3. *Yoga Sutra*, 2.15.
4. See, for instance, the dialogue between Narada and Sanatkumara in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, Chapter 8.
5. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, recorded by her devotee-children (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2000), 386-7.
6. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1978), 386-7.
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.384.
8. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000), 1. 214.
9. *The Apostles of Shri Ramkrishna*, comp. and ed. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), 380.

The conquest of evil comes by the change in the subjective alone.

—Swami Vivekananda

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# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

October 1905

**T**o those who are profoundly distrustful of the basic elements of Western Progress, who have learnt that the humanity (which is the soul of a civilization) evolved by it does not extend to the whole of man but is limited to a certain colour, that its culture means luxury, not refinement, that the key to its temples and shrines is wealth, not worth, that its patriotism signifies its love for a weaker man's country; who have found out that its morality is another name for success by any means and its dread of poverty is consequent on its raising Riches to the throne of the Almighty; in a word, who have discovered under a singularly impressive and bewitching exterior its heart of mere self-interest, qualified no doubt by the epithet 'enlightened', the fact of the acceptance of a compromising peace by Japan, the most successful student in the school of Western Progress, is fraught with supreme interest.

The course of events in Japan since her sudden appearance as a modern power, consummated by her wonderful achievements in the late war, shows her complete possession of the means and methods of Western Progress, a thorough mastery of its science, and a perfect assimilation of its inherent principles. That she did not lose, either on land or water, a single fight with her formidable foe in a war raging over a period of eighteen months and unparalleled in the length of its line of battle as also, if we are not mistaken, in the size of its contending armies, and could at the same time show an internal prosperity in trade and commerce greater than other years, point to a material organisation reached by Japan which is unsurpassed by any Western power. And yet that she should, at the end of a career of victory, though left with undiminished strength and resources and an exalted credit in the money markets of the world, hasten to ratify a peace renouncing three of her most important and most profitable terms, in spite of the violent opposition of a section of her people, who were driven to revolution at this, what they thought, an unworthy action of their Government, is a conduct that would have been impossible in a power brought up in Western traditions and dominated by Western ideals. It demonstrates that Japanese culture has its bases on deeper foundations than that of her Western sister, that though Japan has been able wonderfully to assimilate the spirit of Western Progress, the force that guides her and shapes her ends is spiritual, not material,—a conclusion that is evident from the ease with which she restrained and conquered her material self in a moment of trial than which a more critical one is difficult to imagine.

We are not of opinion that by giving up her claims to an indemnity, to the cession of Sakhalin and to the Russian interned ships, Japan has acted unwisely as regards her material interests. What we wish to lay stress on is the wonderful ease with which she conquered herself when delirious with war-fever and asserted her spiritual self in the flood-tide of material glory. Her action may rightly be called 'far-sighted statesmanship', but the point is, would the action have been possible in a Western power in the same circumstances? We think not. And to our mind the London *Times* barely speaks the truth when it says: 'Japanese statesmen have exhibited a power of self-restraint, rarely, if ever, witnessed in the history of the world, and that there is perhaps no power in Europe capable of adopting such a course. Japan's old chivalrous spirit has led her to disdain the prosecution of war merely for money considerations.'

—from '*Occasional Notes*'

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# The Fact and Mystery of Evil

DR RADHARANI P

Religion is one of the foremost influences that have shaped humankind since time immemorial, and it still remains a guiding force among all peoples—primitive, sophisticated and civilized. Religion has existed for so long because it meets the most peculiar of human needs—emancipation from evil. We are living in an imperfect world and religion is in reality the demand of such a world. It would not be wrong to say that religions are mainly concerned with emancipation from evil. The different religions of the world accept evil as a fact and have tried to overcome it. There have been thinkers who have claimed that if there were no evil, then the various religions of the world would not have come into being. So in the debates and discussions about religion the problem of evil occupies a crucial place.

## Is Evil a Reality?

There are thinkers who reject the reality of evil. They believe that what appears as evil is not truly evil; it appears so because of defects in our vision. Evil can be transcended, and after getting moksha, or liberation, evil no longer remains evil. Good and evil are of the nature of paired opposites—evil is the abasement of good. The concept of good has got a positive meaning. As evil is the opposite of good, it has got a negative meaning. In actual life humans do experience various kinds of degenerations which can be considered evil. As we are experiencing all these, they are a real aspect of our existence.

The enigma of evil presents a massive and direct threat to our faith. As long as we live in this religiously ambiguous world the fact of evil will continue to haunt our faith in the reality of an all-loving and all-powerful

Creator. The problem of evil can be approached in many ways—it can be approached in an impious spirit, without religious presuppositions, or it can be approached from the standpoint of a religious person. The mode of inquiry will vary from individual to individual. But the main problem is: Can the presence of evil in the world be reconciled with the existence of a God who is omnipotent and eternally existent? This formulation is common to both theists and atheists. For the atheists this problem stands as a major obstacle to religious commitment; for the theists this conundrum is a source of disturbance to their faith and sets up a burden of doubt.

The problem of evil does not become a threat to every religion. It is a problem to religions which insist that the object of their worship is at once perfectly good and all-powerful. Of course, most of the world's living religions attribute both omnipotence and infinite goodness to God, and so find this problem inescapable. Christianity considers God the most perfect conceivable being and has therefore insisted upon acknowledging the problem of evil in the person of Satan, who perpetually accuses faith.

If God is all-powerful, He must be able to abolish all evils. But evil is a reality, and so either God is not perfectly good or He is not unlimitedly powerful. This paradox is not something that can be easily unravelled. Here the sceptic has an advantage over the believer.

The problem of evil and its attempted resolution is what is known as theodicy. It refers to the defence of divine omnipotence in the face of the fact of evil. It was Leibniz who first used this term. But there are thinkers who believe that there really is no genuine theodicy, for no legitimate way of thinking about

the problem of evil satisfies both mind and conscience.

### Types of Evil

The term *evil* is usually used in a comprehensive sense. Metaphysical, physical and mental evils are often cited as natural evils. Metaphysical evil is beyond the control of man because it exists due to the operation of the laws of nature. It is something which originates independently of human action. There are natural calamities like tornadoes, earthquakes, storms, floods and droughts that kill in hundreds and thousands. Diseases like cancer, leprosy and AIDS have ravaged humankind; disabilities like blindness and deafness also pose serious challenges to normal life. Natural evil consists in unwelcome experiences brought upon sentient creatures, human or subhuman, by causes other than human. Modern science is still trying to control external environment and prevent it from doing harm to humanity. Mental and physical evils are to a great extent being controlled by science. Moral evil is that which we human beings originate. It results from the exercise of human will or it is due to the violation of moral laws. Unjust, vicious, cruel and perverse thoughts are moral evils. As they are created by humans they can be checked by them.

In the case of human suffering the intellectual problem of evil usually originates in the mind of the spectator rather than in that of the sufferer. The sufferer's main concern is to face and cope with the evil that is pressing upon him and what he needs is grace, courage and hope. For him evil is not a problem but a mystery to be confronted. Sartre had pointed out that the spectator is not actually involved in the suffering; he only reflects upon the fact that another person is involved in it.

### Evil: A Dilemma

The problem of evil is a puzzle for Western theists because they assume that God is loving, just, omnipotent and good. The exis-

tence of evil is annoying for such a conception of God; the fact of evil is wholly incompatible with an all-good and omnipotent God. Western thinkers have generally considered the problem of evil as an intellectual problem and it has been left to social activists to attend to its eradication.

The Greek Sophists were of the opinion that humans had the inheritance and culture of animals. Laws of society such as respect for life and property, keeping one's promises, and the like are conventional in nature and are not really natural to humans. An evil nature is present in all humans; they are, by nature, lustful and destructive of social life. But one finds that the maximum satisfaction of selfish desires may be had by accepting some restrictions on them. So goodness is conventional and not natural to man. Behavioural psychologists agree with this interpretation of human nature. The Sophists believed that one can construct one's own code of good and evil. But this kind of belief can prove dangerous when applied in practical life.

Socrates, on the contrary, believed that goodness is naturally present in the heart of man. The human soul is rational and wisdom is the virtue of the psyche or soul. The human soul is capable of knowing the truth, and to know oneself is to know the soul. Man's happiness consists in cultivating excellences of the soul, and for this, control of passions in the light of knowledge is necessary. Sometimes man is engaged in wrong actions because he does not know it to be wrong. If man knows which actions develop the excellences of the soul, he will choose them because no one deliberately wishes to spoil his own soul. It is by ignorance that man acts contrary to what is best or just. So according to Socrates, evil is the result of ignorance. To remove ignorance one should have the knowledge of what is good for the soul. When a man knows the art of good life, he lives a good life.

According to Plato the world of ideas is the world of goodness; the empirical world or



the world of change is evil. He denied the assumption that the Supreme Being is the source of both evil and good. He states: 'He is responsible for a few things that happen to men, but for many he is not, for the good things we enjoy are much fewer than the evil. The former we must attribute to none else but God, but for the evil we must find some other causes, not God.'<sup>1</sup>

The Stoics (a school founded by the Greek philosopher Zeno) put forward two solutions to the problem of evil. For them the world is good and perfect and what we call evil is only relative. Just as shadows add beauty to a picture, the relative evils contribute to the beauty and perfection of the whole or the good. Again, for them evil is a necessary means of realizing the good, for virtue without its opposite is impossible. 'The truth is that the universe, when viewed in cosmic perspective, is a beautiful, good and perfect whole, in which every part has its own proper place and purpose, and no part when considered in relation to the whole is ugly or evil.'<sup>2</sup>

For Saint Augustine evil is really a privation of goodness which is proper to the world. If there is no negation of good, good loses its value. Evil is something negative, that is, it is absence or lack of good. It is the lack of some positive power or quality that a thing ought by

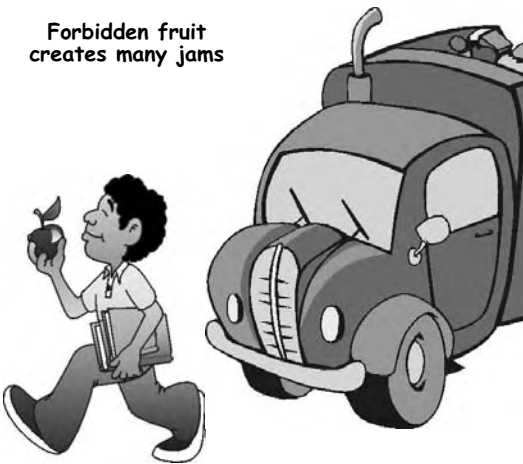
its nature to have. Augustine argues that evils—both moral and natural—are directly or indirectly the result of the wrong choices of free rational beings. God created all things good and the free creatures misuse the God-given freedom and from this fall originate all other evils that we know of. God is without any taint of evil, but evil cannot be without God. 'God could have omitted evil altogether from the scheme of things, but he preferred to use it as a means of serving the good. The glory of the universe is enhanced by the presence of evil' (180). Evil or defect exists in something good, and so there cannot be a purely evil being.

Saint Thomas Aquinas believed that God allows evils to happen in order to bring about a greater good therefrom. He also expressed the view that evil is a negation or absence. As long as beings act according to their nature and reason they are good; evils arise when these actions become defective. Likewise, moral evil is due to defective will, that is, failure of the will to act according to natural reason or divine law. Evil is often not deliberate, but due to factors beyond one's control.

Spinoza explains that evil is the result of our narrow outlook on things. Evil appears when we look at things from the standpoint of a particular interest. But evil can be eradicated when we learn to look at things from a holistic standpoint or from the standpoint of God. To Hegel evils are only irrational elements tending to become good or rational. Both Spinoza and Hegel practically denied the reality of evil.

Leibniz accepted evil as a fact. Evil is due to the imperfections that are inherent in the construction of the finite elements of the universe. According to him, this is the best of all possible worlds, and evil is a necessary part of the universe. God has introduced harmony in the universe, but it is not perfect because the Infinite can never be adequately expressed through the finite objects that exist in the universe. So the present world is perforce imper-

**Forbidden fruit  
creates many jams**



fect. Evil is the result of such limitations. Leibniz firmly believes that the presence of evil in life only enhances the beauty of goodness. If the existence of God is taken as a part of firm knowledge or faith, then the problem of evil cannot constitute a real threat.

### Evil Is a Fact and It Can Be Removed

The presence of evil in the world presents a problem to every theistic account of the universe. Indian thinkers were also faced with the problem. The Upanishads do not claim that evil is a mere illusion. At the same time, they do not say that it is permanent. Evil is unreal because it can be transmuted into good, but it requires effort to transform its nature. To that extent it is real. The Upanishads clearly state that only good ultimately exists. 'The true prevails, not the untrue.' Evil is something negative and self-contradictory. Struggle is the law of existence and suffering is a condition for progress. All progress has a destructive side.

According to Advaita Vedanta, at the *paramarthika* level there is only one reality, that is Brahman. This ultimate Reality is untouched by evil. Evil has place only at the *vyavaharika* level. Everything belonging to this level is the result of maya. So evil is illusory only in this sense of its lacking in ultimate reality.

Buddhism presents a pessimistic faith, but Buddha shows us how to attain peace. He holds that the real cause of evil in man is craving, *tanhā*, and that it arises out of fallacious faith in the 'I'. Ignorance is the primary cause out of which false desires originate. Clinging to the 'I' or 'me and mine' creates selfish desires. Selfish desires lead to evil conduct. The total extinction of suffering or evil is what is known as nirvana. This total extinction of suffering, decay and death can be obtained in this life itself by following the Eightfold Path.

Sri Ramakrishna points out that 'one may read the *Bhāgavata* by the light of a lamp, and another may commit a forgery by that very light; but the lamp is unaffected. The sun

sheds its light on the wicked as well as on the virtuous.'<sup>3</sup> In the same way Brahman is unattached to righteousness and unrighteousness, good and evil. He adds, 'You may ask, "How, then, can one explain misery and sin and unhappiness?"' The answer is that these apply only to the jiva. Brahman is unaffected by them. There is poison in a snake; but though others may die if bitten by it, the snake itself is not affected by the poison' (ibid.). In the same way, God is not responsible for good or evil. Our intelligence is covered with ignorance, and so we have only imperfect understanding. Because of this we believe that God creates good and evil.

Swami Vivekananda said that our life is a mixture of good and evil. Man's life is followed by the shadow of death. The mixture of life and death, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, is the result of maya. 'Wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good.'<sup>4</sup> According to him, to have good and no evil is childish nonsense. But, 'behind good and evil stands something which is yours, the real you, beyond every evil, and beyond every good too, and it is that which is manifesting itself as good and bad'. So, according to Swami-ji, by knowing one's infinite nature one can transcend evil.

Tagore said that the created beings of this world are finite and limited, and that evil originates from this finitude. In imperfect creations evils are natural but existence itself is not an evil. 'Even illusion is true as illusion.'<sup>5</sup> Though evils are facts of life, they are not ultimate facts; they have to be superseded. Imperfection or evil is merely a stage leading to perfection or good. According to Gandhiji, evils arise on account of neglect of the truth that is all-pervasive. There is an element of essential goodness in every man because man contains divinity within himself. Evils result because this element is clouded by passion, hatred and the like. So what is required is to awaken this aspect of man.

## Conclusion

The explanations given by various thinkers of the concept of evil are not exhaustive or perfect. Some thinkers point out that evil is due to the misuse of human will, but this explanation is not a convincing solution to the problem of evil. This kind of explanation goes against the omnipotent nature of God. If God is all-powerful, why should He not check evil? If God could not control human free will, then He is not omnipotent. Again, the free-will argument explains moral evils only. Kant criticized the free-will argument by saying that it is contradictory to believe that God creates the wills of man without knowing the details of this willing.

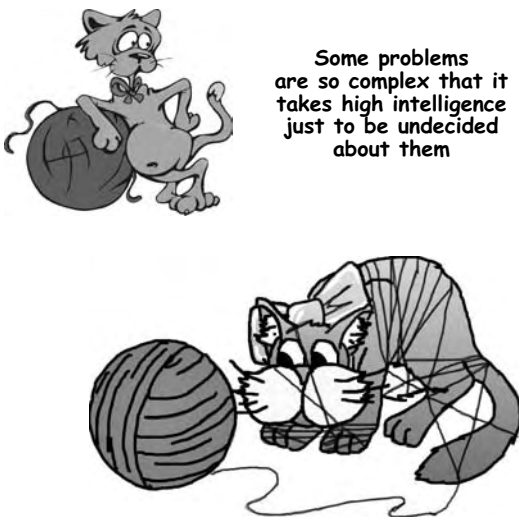
Some theistic thinkers consider natural evils as punishments for moral evils. But it is a fact that even in criminal anthropology, preference is given to the reformation of criminals rather than punishment. In natural calamities we find that innocent people are subjected to death and suffering and this strongly calls into question divine justice and benevolence. Again, it is said that evils are disciplinary. This explanation is also not convincing because it is not true that evils always inspire humankind. 'Evils add value to good'—this is another way

of explaining the concept of evil, but in order to know the good, it is not necessary that one should know the evil. It is not necessary to eat a rotten apple in order to enjoy the taste of a good one. It is also pointed out that evil is incomplete good (Hegel). This idea has also been rejected because from the incomplete alone one cannot desire the goodness of the complete.

After an analysis of the various arguments for the solution of the problem of evil, one can rightly reach the conclusion that none of the theories has been able to explain convincingly the problem of evil. In one way or other, the arguments are relative. The main drawback of the Western thinkers was that they considered evil as an intellectual problem. They tried their best to safeguard the omnipotence of God in the presence of evil. The standpoints of the Indian thinkers, especially the views of Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are worth noticing. They accepted evil as a fact of our world, for life itself is full of suffering. Their main problem is to point out the way of escape from these sufferings. For them, the problem of evil is both an intellectual and an existential problem. But this is not an inescapable existential, and there are proven paths to transcendence of evil. Indian thinkers describe how humans can be relieved of their sufferings and linked in happiness with fellow human beings. \*

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# Deliverance from Evil

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

To contain and eradicate evil has always been and will remain the greatest of human problems. The majority down the ages—from saints and philosophers to common men and women—has silently worked to show man the path of peace and goodness by eschewing evil. The effects of all these efforts seem to get dissipated like mist before the scorching heat of evil. Evil is like a powerful and dangerous Minotaur feeding on man in the darkened labyrinths of the world. While the animal is angry and hungry, man runs about trapped, terrorized, and traumatized. This has been man's nemesis and will continue to be so until humans acquire some weapon to kill the beast called evil. The only weapon that is useful, and which all humans are heir to, is knowledge. It is only through knowledge that evil is conquered. To conquer evil is to conquer 'self' and also the world. This is real conquest, and yoga is the means to this conquest.

## Wrestling with Evil

Vice and viciousness, impurity and immorality, carnality and corruption, and a host of such other things that we see all around, are only various aspects of evil. If humans are trying to eradicate evil, then they must either be joking or fighting a losing battle. On the face of it, it seems to be humans who are getting contained and eradicated by evil. The combined massive murderous tendencies of nations have made wars into scientific and blessed necessities. The irrational, deliberate, and grim hate of various groups of people have led to terrorism, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Modern society is awash with crime and abettors of crime. To top it off, the ubiquitous big- and small-time robbers, cheats, bribe-seekers

and liars are everywhere. This small list is sure to provoke you to add something you personally know. That is because we have all experienced many a time the revolting face of evil. Those who believe in religion have had it bad because the vigorous and sharp-clawed paws of evil are constantly tearing into their religious beliefs. In the face of such onslaught how long can one's beliefs remain intact? Swami Vivekananda says:

The greater portion of our life must of necessity be filled with evils, however we may resist, and ... this mass of evil is practically almost infinite for us. ... To the question how to cure the evils of life, the answer apparently is, give up life. It reminds one of the old story: A mosquito settled on the head of a man, and a friend, wishing to kill the mosquito, gave it such a blow that he killed both man and mosquito. The remedy of evil seems to suggest a similar course of action.

## The Bifurcate Nature of the World

Duality is a fact of our ordinary consciousness. All our experiences—physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and, in most cases, spiritual also—are coloured by the duality of good and bad. The world is rooted in duality. Even as you read this article you will be judging it as either good or bad. Well-meaning people have been seeking a solution to the problem of evil within this natural state of existence and experience, not knowing that duality must have evil as its integral component.

## Escaping Our Own Shadow

Duality is not static. It constantly revolves and transforms. We try to pin down something as good and pure and after a while find that it has turned bad. If it is still good to us, it might be bad to someone else. We want to do evil and our good side arrests the action,

and likewise, when we want to do good, evil arrests us. This is true at both the individual and collective levels. Thus we are actually straining hopelessly against our own selves. Some dualistic religions have taken the easy way out by blaming the existence of evil on the handiwork of some entity other than God. Everything was good until the Devil came and spoilt it. This has been the simplistic explanation of things as they obtain—we blame the Devil for evil and praise God for the good. Next, we are told to give up all concerns with Mammon and expect a place beyond this world of duality, a heaven in which evil is absent and only good remains. Evil is all dismissed into a convenient place named hell, where there is no cauldron but only fire. It is actually human duality here that has created an afterlife, but unlike here, in heaven duality has been solved by making the divide so huge that one side does not affect the other!

Those who are not eschatologically inclined sink into existentialism, which says humans are free and responsible for their actions in a world without meaning and without God. Others urge us to accept evil as a fact in the universe and learn to live with it because there is no other way. There are some who deny the existence of evil by closing their eyes to it and calling it good. But the problem of evil has evaded all efforts at a solution and cut us up into sorry figures.

### **Evil Appears Worse from a Narrow Viewpoint**

We speak of the evils of disease, decay and death as the natural course of things. Devastations like earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis, and the like are also seen as the workings of natural laws on a massive scale. We class accidents as unfortunate and avoidable. In our individual life it is the inevitable small evils, which bleed our conscience and morality, that are worrisome and unanswerable. Alcoholism, murder, infidelity, corruption, revenge, covetousness, and the like take our life away.

We shout and scream: 'Why! Why, O God, does this have to happen to me?' Yet, we feel no anguish when someone unknown is murdered. Thus self-interest enhances the perception of evil. Hence a one-sided and narrow view makes evil more hideous, frightening and insoluble. However, no one can say that evil is a chimera and does not exist. It is experienced. Evil is real and painful. And physically, mentally and morally we constantly struggle to rid ourselves of this pain.

### **Evil Is a Part of Us**

Call evil by any other name like sin, iniquity or badness, one fact remains unchanged—evil is the dark aspect present in everything. It is our own dark face, hidden yet actually acting like a counterbalance. It is the necessary complement in all phenomena from the highest to the lowest. It is like a leash laid upon everything.

The doctrine of maya is one of the best frameworks for understanding our subjective and objective experiences. Better sense can be made of evil when looked at within the framework of maya. The saint and the sinner, the beautiful and the hideous, war and peace, crime and punishment, vice and virtue—all operate within this unified framework. In Hinduism, both good and evil have emanated from one source, and many Hindu gods and goddesses are depicted accordingly. Within maya, this duality is not contradictory but complementary. There cannot be the one without the other.

There cannot be a perfectly good or a perfectly evil act: '*Sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnirivāṇṛtāḥ*'; All undertakings are enveloped by evil, as fire by smoke.<sup>2</sup> Knowing that both are inextricably linked makes us see things in a correct perspective. As we mature we shall get to see evil in a different light. We shall find that it is our ignorance that makes us see evil. And we shall learn that 'both the forces of good and evil will keep the universe alive for us.'<sup>3</sup>

### The Interrelatedness of Phenomena

Says Swami Vivekananda: 'That which is bad today may be good tomorrow. What is good for me may be bad for you. ... There is something which in its evolution, we call, in one degree, good, and in another, evil. The storm that kills my friend I call evil, but that may have saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by killing the bacilli in the air. ... So both good and evil belong to the relative world' (1.376-7). So it is clear that there is nothing that is independent in the universe. No phenomenon is simple. Every particle, every thought, is in a continuous state of flow, interlinked with other particles and thoughts. Today it is not philosophy alone but hard science that is corroborating this self-evident truth. The physicist David Bohm says:

We have reversed the usual classical notion that the independent 'elementary parts' of the world are the fundamental reality, and that the various systems are merely particular contingent forms and arrangements of these parts. Rather, we say that inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independent behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole.<sup>4</sup>

The universe is a complex intermix of forces working out not just at one level but on multiple levels of reality.

One of Sri Ramakrishna's remarkable visions throws its revealing light on the problem of good and evil:

He saw a female figure of extraordinary beauty rise from the waters of the Ganga and come with a dignified gait to the Panchavati. Presently, he saw that the said figure was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. A few minutes later she gave birth to a beautiful baby in his very presence and suckled the baby very affectionately; the next moment he saw that the same figure assumed a very cruel and frightful appearance, and taking the baby into her mouth, masticated it and swallowed it! She then entered the waters of the river whence she had appeared.<sup>5</sup>

What Sri Ramakrishna saw was the working

of Mahamaya, the Great Power of the Mother of the universe.

### The Truth about Restraint

Swami Vivekananda points out:

There is one impulse in our minds which says, do. Behind it rises another voice, which says, do not. There is one set of ideas in our mind which is always struggling to get outside through the channels of the senses, and behind that, although it may be thin and weak, there is an infinitely small voice which says, do not go outside. The two beautiful Sanskrit words for these phenomena are Pravritti and Niyritti, 'circling forward' and 'circling inward'.<sup>6</sup>

Evidently, there is an inbuilt restraining factor in the very nature of things. We have also seen that good may be transmuted into evil and evil into good. If this is true, there must be an identity somewhere which is not apparent on the surface. Swamiji says, 'What makes this world what it is? Lost balance. In the primal state, which is called chaos, there is perfect balance. How do all the formative forces of the universe come then? By struggling, competition, conflict. Suppose that all the particles of matter were held in equilibrium, would there be then any process of creation?' (1.113-4).

Creation, preservation and destruction are inherent in all phenomena. In reality, there is no destruction but only transformations. These transformations we call birth and death and everything in between. After death comes rebirth. Transformations do not begin at point A and end at point Z but the waves of transformation flow in a circle. When on the ascent, they are called 'good', and when on the descent, 'evil'.

The human personality is the result of the dynamic interplay of conscious and subconscious forces. And when one personality interacts with another it is like two waves clashing. We surge around and bump into others all the time—this is the permanent waltz of nature. 'Here we are with strong impulses and stron-

ger cravings for sense enjoyments, but cannot satisfy them. There rises a wave, which impels us forward in spite of our own will, and as soon as we move one step, comes a blow' (2.110-1). This is nature's auto-control.

### The Power of Conscious Restraint

What we described above are the inbuilt restraining factors. When it comes to conscious restraint the effects are equally apparent. When we restrain ourselves voluntarily we feel uplifted and energetic. There are times in everyone's life when the disastrous effects of licence, craving, weakness and pettiness are felt and we bitterly berate ourselves on our folly. On retrospection we invariably tell ourselves that it would have been better if we had exercised restraint. Deep down we know of the evil consequences of unrestrained thought and action. On the advantages of restraint Swamiji says:

Self-restraint is a manifestation of greater power than all outgoing action. A carriage with four horses may rush down a hill unrestrained, or the coachman may curb the horses. Which is the greater manifestation of power, to let them go or to hold them? A cannon-ball flying through the air goes a long distance and falls. Another is cut short in its flight by striking against a wall, and the impact generates intense heat. All outgoing energy following a selfish motive is frittered away; it will not cause power to return to you; but if restrained, it will result in development of power. This self-control will tend to produce a mighty will, a character which makes a Christ or a Buddha. Foolish men do not know this secret (1.33).

### *Pravritti* and *Nivritti*

It is precisely this idea of conscious restraint of the mind sustained by will power that yoga advances. This restraint leads humans to higher endeavours and opens up new vistas in their personality. The *pravritti* and *nivritti* spoken of earlier are in the context of a *vritti*, or thought wave. Every wave has a trough as counterpoint and also other *vritis*

that thwart it. This is the auto-control spoken of earlier. Thus each activity, each mental impulse has a check, a counter. In the *Yoga Sutras* the technical words are *vyutthana vritti*, the manifest thought wave, and *nirodha vritti*, the restraining thought wave. We know how the mind wanders. The mind has now to be put on a second, shorter, leash. 'Resist all evils, mental and physical; and when you have succeeded in resisting, then will calmness come' (1.40).

Yoga is not concerned with the question of evil and its solution in an absolute sense. The goal is mukti, or freedom, freedom from both good and evil. As Sri Ramakrishna says: 'One takes the thorn of knowledge to remove the thorn of ignorance, then throws both away.' For our purpose the illustration of a pendulum-clock is apt. When the pendulum swings to one side that very swing builds up the potential energy required to swing it to the other side. Both swings are equal and this swinging makes the clock work. If the pendulum does not work, the clock stops. Thus 'both forces of good and evil will keep the universe alive for us'. If evil is to be transcended, the good will have to be abandoned too. For, as Swamiji has pointed out: 'Fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind.'

### Transformations Leading to Knowledge

In the initial stages of yoga the moral disciplines of *yama* and *niyama*, coupled with a strong spirit of renunciation and unswerving practice, hold back the natural tendency of the mind to gush out through the senses. As we arrest the swinging pendulum by degrees, by curbing the wild transformations in the mind, it moves steadily towards the highest realm of human experience that is the result of the highest conscious control. Three such transformations (*parinama*) are spoken of in yoga philosophy: *nirodha parinama*, *samadhi parinama* and *ekagrata parinama* (1.272).

The yogi first puts a leash on thought waves related to the body like hunger, thirst,

heat, cold, and sleep. Next, with the same leash (and method) the powerful internal instinctive energies like lust, greed, anger, hatred, jealousy and pride are brought under control. The negative side having come under the leash, it implies that the positive side also has come under control.

A tremendous power is slowly building up every time the yogi obstructs and controls thought on the surface of the mind. The samskaras, or impressions, of the disturbing thought as well as that of the obstructing *vritti* naturally sink below consciousness. If the disturbing thought is activated through memory, it rises, but with the inevitable impression of obstruction tagged along. Thus the fight that is initiated by the conscious mind also goes on in the subconscious though we are not aware of the latter. The mind is always transforming itself and the restraint also is continuous. As the process reaches a critical threshold, the yogi feels the will power in him throbbing and growing. Imagine a tug of war between two sets of equally strong people. The rope along with the tugging competitors appears stationary, but tremendous power is being expended. In this state the mind is stilled due to the opposing forces of *vyutthana* and *nirodha*. This is the first stage called *nirodha parinama*.

In the next stage the yogi attempts to hold on to a solitary idea or object in his mind, excluding all other distracting thoughts (whether good or bad). This is *samadhi parinama*.

With repeated experiences of *nirodha* and *samadhi* transformations, the mind becomes

mature and the subconscious samskaras are attenuated. The mind now undergoes the *ekagrata parinama* and is able to sustain a solitary thought to the exclusion of all distractions. By now, both good and evil have lost their hold on the yogi. That is why the yogi who has mastered the transformation of *samadhi* gets beyond both good and evil. He is now established in the perfect state of yoga. To his inner vision the secret of the universe stands revealed. This is the highest state of yoga, beyond the bonds and wantonness of nature. These three *parinamas* give rise to supreme knowledge and this completely frees the yogi.

[The author has followed Swami Vivekananda in his use of the term *nirodha parinama*. Vyasa, the traditional commentator on the *Yoga Sutras*, uses it to refer to a stage beyond *ekagrata parinama* wherein the mind is freed of all thought. —Editor.] \*

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## Combating Evil

**H**ow can you struggle against evil tendencies if your intellect is not trained to differentiate between good and evil? First clear out the rubbish which has entered the mind through the gates of the sense organs, and then put a 'NO ADMITTANCE' sign in front of each gate. Those bad thoughts which ignore the notice and still come in, you will have to hand over to the police, which is your conscience. With the help of the police you must evict the impure tendencies from the mind and then install the Lord there. This is the way to conquer lust and desire.

—Swami Adbhutananda



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# Living with Tension

DIBAKAR CHAKRABARTI

People in general want to get rid of tension. Our efforts have always been directed at reducing tension—to live tension-free lives if possible. ‘Tension-free life’ is perhaps a misnomer. Just as there are variations in nature—in seasons, climates, and topography—there are continuously changing physical conditions in the body too. Disease is part of life. With disease comes affliction. This causes tension. There is tension in the workplace because one is required to work for achieving targets. There is tension at home since the level of well-being of individuals changes. There is tension when the rhythm of relationship between two persons gets disturbed. There is tension when the mother goes through the process of delivering a child. So the world is full of tension. It is not possible to attain a condition completely devoid of tension. Therefore, we need to learn to live with tension and accept tension as part of life.

These days we find regular campaigns about the ways to reduce tension. People rush to counsellors, astrologers and monks in search of ways for relieving tension. Addressing the problem of tension has been a prominent concern of business these days. It is therefore of interest to focus on this issue if we want to live a life of serenity amidst problems and tensions.

It is possible to cope with tension by adopting a change of attitude and lifestyle. As one learns to cope with tension in a more effective way, one learns to work amidst tension, although to an outside observer it would appear that this person is not at all affected by tension. While others are broken down by the stresses of life, this person uses them to his advantage. An attempt is being made hereby to formulate some tips for handling tension.

## Watching Our Desires and Moods

Most of the conflicts of life arise from our craving for things that we do not have. There is a mismatch between what we want and what we have. This leads to conflict. We are drawn to the path of war. Sometimes we can extract what we want by force. On most occasions we fail. We are demoralized and frustrated. It is therefore useful to ask ‘Do I need it?’ before one develops the tempo for acquiring a thing. In most cases a dispassionate analysis of such a query will lead to the answer that many of the things that we want are not needed at all. If we can rationalize our wants we have made a substantial progress in reducing occasions for tension.

We need to be always watchful of our thought processes and actions. We must detect any signal that may prompt us to do or say something impulsively. With the early detection of such triggering factors we should be able to control ourselves, take a pause, and if possible shift the subject or move out of the scene. Any action by one who is emotionally charged is likely to invite complications. Therefore, a continuous vigil on one’s moods and thought processes is helpful in avoiding problems.

## Living in the Present

We have a tendency to analyse current events and extrapolate their likely implications to the future. For example, a father worries when the son does not study regularly following a set routine. He worries that negligence in study will bring poor performance in examinations and invite career problems. This obsessive preoccupation with the future well-being of the son gives rise to worry. It is quite possible that the boy, even without being

regular in study for some days or weeks, may later develop a tempo for serious study and perform well in examinations. It is also possible that with a mediocre performance in education one can still hit a respectable career. Therefore, we should try to live in the present and stop worrying about the future that is yet to arrive. We should overcome the tendency to paint the worst scenario and subject ourselves to suffering much before the time it actually materializes.

Some problems are time-specific. If someone is sensitive to cold, they may do well to remember that with the passage of winter such problems will be over. This also applies to minor ailments that come and go. We have a tendency to magnify the present level of discomfort and push ourselves into much psychological suffering. We may be better off if we visualize that the current phase of the episode is about to pass away and better times would come.

This takes us to another important area. This is exercise of patience. We can easily cope with difficulties if we learn to exercise patience. At the same time we should be optimistic. Even in the worst condition we should hope that a change for the better may be in the offing.

For some of us it is not the future but past memories that are a source of anxiety. While happy memories gives us pleasure, bad memories cause pain and anxiety. It is therefore necessary that we try to get rid of the past and live in the present. We should particularly try to prevent bad memories from overwhelming our awareness time and again. This can be done by facing these memories and becoming aware of the fact that they are mere memories and not current realities.

### Handling Our Egos

Many of the problems in relationships arise from a feeling of ego compromise. We may not publicly accept this. We may project the view that there is difference of opinion

over facts or issues, whereas in reality this 'difference' is motivated by an apprehended loss of respect or hurt ego. On many occasions we get agitated not because of what is said but because of the manner in which it is said. Form becomes more important than content. It is definitely a sign of one's falling prey to emotion. In such a situation no discussion or debate can be healthy, objective or unbiased. Therefore, we should guard against avoidable verbal duels that further tension.

The consequences of being too ego-conscious can be serious. Such persons may develop a critical and confrontationist nature. A person who always criticizes and finds fault is likely to be disliked by others. He may consequently be isolated. Love and understanding bring people closer. We should accept the fact that no one is perfect and learn to get along with people of different abilities and attainments. Hammering a point in an effort to rectify others' mistakes is often a waste of energy. Such an exercise harms the person himself more than help the other party.

It is a good habit to place ourselves in the position of the other side. If I feel hurt when someone says something rude, I should, in my turn, be careful in choosing the language and manner of communicating with others. If we learn to give respect to others, most of the occasions of conflict will disappear. If I understand that someone close to me has done something wrong, I would invite further bitterness by repeatedly hammering on the same. I should approach the person concerned with love and sympathy and try to render guidance at the appropriate time and in proper language. Even if there is no miraculous change immediately, the long-term effect will definitely be better.

### Postponement of Judgement and Rationalization

We make a serious mistake in judging others when, in truth, we are not sure about the correctness of such a course of action. Once

we make a negative judgement it will be reflected in our behaviour and dealings. A pronouncement of such judgement is all the more damaging. A person's behaviour is decided by many factors and the specific circumstances in which he or she is placed. It is difficult for any other person to have a complete knowledge of this background as they analyse such conduct and reach a judgement. Therefore, it is good to postpone judgement, and better still, not to pronounce judgements drawn on the basis of incomplete facts.

We should learn to try and postpone our reaction to any given situation rather than respond impulsively. With sustained practice, we should be able to reach a stage where we can easily withhold such reactions. This is particularly necessary in situations where we are not sure about an issue or fail to take a dispassionate view of the concerned problem.

Many problems can be handled well if we try some rationalization. We may go into the details of why and how a thing happens and what its implications could be. We may come to realize that all is not lost and a way out is available. We can rationalize by thinking that something is a temporary and isolated incident based on which no generalization need be made. We may think that it is a passing phase and the situation would change. We may discover that it is because of our own indifference or neglect that things are bad. We may then amend ourselves and the situation will be better. We may analyse the immediate and long-term implications of a situation and assure ourselves that it is not as serious as it appears on the face of it. There are many ways in which we can rationalize a situation and unearth the prospect of its resolution.

### **Detachment and Practice**

Ultimately, it depends on the level of one's control over the mind whether or not one feels tense in a particular situation. In similar situations different persons would react differently. This depends on the attitude, life-

style, experience, maturity and poise of the person at that particular time. Two important paths for attaining control of mind as advocated by the Bhagavadgita are renunciation and practice. If we exercise control over endless wants, we would have better control over the mind. Control over the restless mind would also improve if we constantly watch the movements of the wandering mind and repeatedly bring it to the object of focus. This would bring poise and clarity of thought. We would see things in the right perspective. Ambiguity and confusion would be reduced. Our capacity to handle disturbances and the associated tension will improve.

When there is turbulence following an unpleasant episode, a detailed analysis of how the incident developed helps in controlling the after-effect. This may be done mentally or by writing it all down on a piece of paper or in a diary. It is useful for a person to be within himself for a while and reflect over the facts and issues. One can have a clearer perception of the problem and decide about the right course of action if one analyses it in a dispassionate way. One can also draw lessons from the event and decide how such a situation can be handled better in future.

It is to be remembered that we have built up an image of ourselves over the years through a series of actions, pursuits, attainments and failures. If we look at ourselves, we may have a realistic estimate of where we stand. This is independent of how others look upon us. We shall then realize that neither will good words or praise elevate our position nor bad words or lack of compliments really downgrade us. A degree of tolerance for instances of maltreatment or loss of honour would help us remain unaffected.

### **Love, Creativity and Endurance**

From our side, we should sincerely wish well for others and extend love for all. We should open out to others and make ourselves accessible to them. Then there is better chance

that a bond of love will be established, and misunderstanding will be reduced.

The best way to love others and be in joy is to love oneself. Whereas we mostly see the external world we hardly care about looking at ourselves. Devoting some time of the day to looking at your face in a mirror and appreciating it is a useful tip for instilling love for yourself. Once we learn to have genuine love for ourselves we would naturally love others. As a result, instances of discord in our relationships will be minimized.

We should keep ourselves busy both at the workplace and at home. We should carefully design our daily routine in such a way that there is a definite place for creative and constructive activities. It is better to remain engaged than leave the mind idle. Remaining engaged in planned activities reduces the restlessness of the mind. Our actions influence our subsequent motives. Therefore, the motivation for visualizing and pursuing higher goals will be reinforced by what we do now.

It is better to face a situation even though it is painful rather than escape from it. If we face the problem and go through its fallout, we will be able to face a similar crisis in a more balanced way next time.

A common source of tension is our tendency to compare ourselves with others.

Comparing with a better placed person for drawing inspiration may be useful. But we should guard against the feeling of jealousy that arises when we compare ourselves with others. We should learn to accept reality and the prevailing conditions of life rather than suffer by imagining what we might have achieved.

### **Giving Ourselves a Break**

For those living their lives under heavy pressure of work at the workplace and at home, it would be refreshing to spend some time at a different location in isolation and, if possible, in the company of a holy person at periodic intervals. This would help recharge their batteries and prepare them to face the ordeals of life with fresh energy.

Finally, we should constantly discriminate between good and bad. What is apparently good may be bitter at the end. We should also discriminate between the real and the unreal and take good times and bad times as passing phases. We should not permit ourselves to be forgetful of the fact that the world is transitory and that the ups and downs of life are not as important as we make them out to be. Keeping such a perspective, we can treat the worst crises in our lives as eminently manageable. \*

### **Emotions Can Kill**

**M**rs W drove into town to consult her attorney about a divorce. When she left his office she was crying and extremely upset. On her way home she had to cross a railroad track. She had driven that way hundreds of times. She knew the train schedule; the tracks were in clear view. The driver gave his warning whistle, yet Mrs W drove directly in front of the express. At the last minute she made a frenzied attempt to escape, but the locomotive killed her instantly.

P K was told by his doctor on Monday that he had cancer. On Tuesday he had an accident. On Thursday he had two more. He had never had an accident before. He was so frightened as a result of the diagnosis that he was unfit to drive.

Powerful emotion destroys your usual caution. A grief-stricken person drives dangerously because her sight and hearing are dulled. A frightened man doesn't realize he's taking chances. An angry woman takes chances because at the moment she doesn't care. An overly joyous man feels impervious to danger. So, when under the sway of emotions, be doubly careful.

*—adapted from James E Payne*

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# Social Implications of the Cardinal Vows and Peace: A Gandhian Perspective

DR T SUSEELA AND DR S ABDUL SATTAR

History is witness to the fact that violent ways have utterly failed to establish social order, peace, unity, safety and security in the world. Mahatma Gandhi writes: 'The world is moving steadily towards the realization that between nation and nation, as between man and man, force has failed to solve problems.'<sup>1</sup> Humankind is compelled to concentrate its attention on non-violent ways to social order. The originator of this unique way, which distinguishes him from other revolutionaries, is Gandhiji. This is why it is also called the Gandhian way of peace. Dr J Edwards supports this view when he observes: 'The way to genuine peace is the way of Gandhiji, the prophet of peace.'<sup>2</sup> After having witnessed the two world wars, which were fought to establish world peace, Gandhiji felt convinced that the non-violent way alone can establish peace in the world. He himself says in his work on non-violent ways to world peace: 'There is no hope for the world except through the narrow and straight path of non-violence. Millions like me may fail to prove the truth in their own lives, that will be their failure never of the external law.'<sup>3</sup> There is no other way to world order, world peace, world unity and world security except the non-violent social order.

A particular type of social order is necessary for man to realize the highest end of his life as envisioned by Gandhiji. According to him, 'Man's ultimate end is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to

find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all.'<sup>4</sup> With this end in view, Gandhiji attempted to conceive and construct such a society which he called Sarvodaya Samaj, which means a society which aims at the greatest good of all. It is a classless, casteless and stateless society based on non-violence and decentralization. This Sarvodaya Samaj is exactly what one may describe as the Gandhian concept of a new social order. This paper is a reflection on the social implications of the Gandhian view of the cardinal vows and peace.

In understanding the social implications of the Gandhian view of the cardinal vows and peace, it is absolutely necessary not merely to define his cardinal vows and establish a proper relationship between them, but also to focus on the nature of peace he has preached and practised. Without understanding this aspect of the Gandhian cardinal vows, one is prone to read meanings which are really not there. Besides, the nature of the cardinal principles can only be discussed within the framework of the Gandhian social system and not in relation to any other system given by anybody else. In this article we would like to discuss at length the nature of these cardinal principles, namely, non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), celibacy (brahmacharya), non-stealing (asteya), and non-possession (aparigraha).

## Satya

Gandhiji's own life was an experiment with truth, a search after Truth. Whenever he had to do anything new in search of Truth, he

would try it first on himself. He thought that by virtue of the strength to arrive at the truth for himself, an individual can be distinguished from a brute. He had a great belief in the capacity of humans to discover and pursue the path of truth, thereby establishing peace in society.

A peaceful life is a fundamental requirement for the search after Truth. Gandhiji thought that for the realization of Truth regular practice—a sort of detachment from materialistic pleasure—was necessary. It should be accompanied by the vows of non-violence, celibacy, non-possession and non-stealing, which are also very necessary. An individual who does not practise these cannot have peace. Consequently, he cannot have a clear conscience and hence will not be able to hear the clear voice of his conscience. To realize Truth, ahimsa is absolutely necessary. If he works contrarily, he comes under the influence of anger, selfishness and lust, and these certainly cannot lead him to the goal of peace. To Gandhiji, violence is untruth which should not exist, because if it does, there would be anarchy in society.

The word *satya* comes from *sat*, which means 'to be', 'to exist'. According to Gandhiji, truth cannot exist without love. Gandhiji says, 'Where there is Truth, there is also knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word Cit or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (Ananda). Sorrow has no place there. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it.'<sup>5</sup> Gandhiji regards truth not only as the law of everything and every being but also as Sat-cit-ananda, one that combines in itself truth, knowledge and bliss (3). Gandhiji declared, 'In Sanskrit we have the words Sat, Cit, Ananda. It is a fine combination. The three together make one word. Truth is knowledge also. It is life. You feel vitality in you when you have got Truth in you. It gives bliss. It is a permanent thing of

which you cannot be robbed. You may be sent to the gallows, or put to torture, but if you have Truth in you, you will experience an inner joy.'<sup>6</sup> In describing the ultimate law as Sat-cit-ananda, Gandhiji's truth, it is noteworthy, becomes identical with Shankara's Brahman. Gandhiji, however, did not call the Absolute by the name Brahman and adopted the term Truth instead.<sup>7</sup> He worshipped God as Truth only.<sup>8</sup>

Truth can be called the sum total of all that is true. But one cannot sum up all that is true. There are things that cannot be analysed. Truth is such. The absolute Truth thus is the presupposition, the foundation of all relative ones, and is itself completely free from 'the dual throng, such as of love and hate, happiness and misery'. As such, Truth is indescribable. The indescribability of the absolute Truth is often described by Gandhiji in paradoxes like 'Truth is hard as adamant and tender as a blossom.' Gandhiji compared Truth to a vast tree which yields more and more fruit the more you nurture it. The deeper the search in the mine of Truth, the richer the discovery of the gems buried there.

Truth includes non-violence, celibacy, non-stealing and other principles. It is only for convenience that the five yamas have been mentioned separately. The person who commits violence after knowing Truth falls away from Truth. Even if a person follows Truth to some degree of perfection, he will have peace for himself. And there is every possibility of everyone obeying this person's word as law. Just as the sun's light does not need to be pointed out, Truth shines in its own light. Truth is its own proof. In an age of evil, it is difficult to follow Truth to perfection, but Gandhiji believed that it was not impossible. If a large number from among us strive to follow it even in some measure, we can have peace in society. In the opinion of Gandhiji, we can have peace in society if a few of us pursue it with utmost consciousness, only we must be sincere.

## Ahimsa

Literally, ahimsa means 'non-injury'. But to Gandhiji it had a world of meaning and took him into realms much higher, infinitely higher, than the one obtainable if he had merely taken ahimsa for non-killing. Ahimsa really means not to offend anybody. One may not harbour any uncharitable thought, even in connection with a person who may be considered one's enemy. Gandhiji did not consider anybody his enemy even though some people might have considered him their enemy. Further, according to Gandhiji, for one who follows the doctrine of ahimsa there is no room for enmity. He denies the existence of an enemy. There may have been people who considered themselves his enemies, but he could not help it. So Gandhiji held that one ought not to harbour an evil thought even in connection with such persons. If one returns a blow for a blow, one departs from the doctrine of ahimsa. Gandhiji says, if we resent a friend's action, or the so-called enemy's action, we fall short of this ideal. But when he says we should not resent, he does not say that we should offer no opposition. By 'resentment' Gandhiji means wishing that some harm should befall the enemy, or that he should be put out of the way, even if that be not through any action of ours but by the agency of somebody else, say by divine agency. If we even harbour this thought, we commit a breach of ahimsa, according to Gandhiji.<sup>9</sup>

The doctrine of ahimsa, according to Gandhiji, tells us that we may guard the honour of those who are in our charge by delivering ourselves into the hands of the people who would seek to injure them. Ahimsa requires far greater physical and mental courage than that required for delivering physical blows. Physical power has obvious limitations. Once the physical power is expended, what happens? The other person is filled with wrath and indignation. We made him more angry by matching our violence against his, and when he has done us to death, the rest of his violence

is directed against those who are in our charge. But if we do not retaliate but stand our ground between our charges and the opponent, simply receiving the blows without retaliating, what happens? Gandhiji raises the question and gives us his promise that the whole of the opponent's violence will be expended on us, and our charges will be left unscathed. Such a conception of ahimsa leaves no room for the kind of patriotism that justifies wars (ibid.).

Therefore, Gandhiji has rightly stated that ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of ahimsa, but at a subtle level the principle of ahimsa is violated by every evil thought, by lying, by undue haste, by hatred, or by ill will. It is also violated by our selfish holding on to something that society needs.<sup>10</sup>

So, without ahimsa, it is not possible to seek and find Truth. According to Gandhiji, ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means, and Truth is the end. The means must always be within our reach and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of our peaceful means, we are bound to reach the peaceful end sooner or later. Once we have grasped this point, the establishment of peace in society is beyond doubt (ibid.). In the words of Gandhiji, 'When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not apply to isolated acts.' It is a grave error to suppose that while the law is good enough for individuals it is not for the masses.

Prophets and avatars have also taught the lesson of ahimsa. Not one of them has professed *himsa*. And how could it be otherwise? *Himsa* does not need to be taught. Man as an animal is violent, but as Spirit is non-violent, in Gandhiji's view. The moment man awakens to the Spirit within, he cannot remain violent,

but progresses towards ahimsa. That is why the prophets and avatars have taught the lessons of truth, harmony, brotherhood and justice—all attributes of ahimsa, which is another name of peace.<sup>11</sup>

Ahimsa is the righteous means. There is no limit to its power. The psychology of ahimsa is full of significance. It is a plan for self-purification, mass-purification and enemy-purification. It is an active principle of love. It is conscious suffering for the cause of righteousness. It is a way of life that makes full use of the strength of the Spirit.

To Gandhiji ahimsa was essentially a positive and dynamic force. In his words: 'In its positive form, *Ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of *Ahimsa*, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer, who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active *Ahimsa* necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.'<sup>12</sup> In fact, in its positive aspect ahimsa is only love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. In an act of love one identifies with the object of one's love. Gandhiji defined true love thus: 'True love consists in transferring itself from the body to the dweller within and then necessarily realizing the oneness of all life inhabiting numberless bodies. The real love is to love them that hate you, to love your neighbour even though you distrust him.'<sup>13</sup>

For Gandhiji, to use violence against the evil-doer is to deny spiritual unity with him. Non-violence, on the other hand, seeks to conquer evil with good. It is no non-violence if we merely love those that love us. It is non-violence only when we love those that hate us.<sup>14</sup> Ahimsa includes the whole of creation and not human beings alone. So ahimsa in its active form is goodwill towards all life. Ahimsa, in its positive form, means the willingness to treat all beings as one's very self (*atmavat sarvabhuteshu*), a standpoint stressed repeatedly in the Gita.

Gandhiji's ahimsa is based on the faith in

the existence of unity of spirit, the fellowship of all living beings on earth, and above all in a reverence for life. Although he preferred to use the negative word *non-violence*, he regarded it as a positive force superior to all the forces of brutality. In this sense it is an active force of the highest order. 'It is soul-force or the power of the Godhead within us.'<sup>15</sup> This is Gandhiji's message of ahimsa.

Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism have always regarded ahimsa as the highest dharma and they have extended it even to the subhuman world. So there is a long and well-established tradition of ahimsa in India. But Gandhiji's originality consisted in extending the law of ahimsa from individual action to collective action, from domestic affairs to national and international affairs, and inventing a technique for its application in establishing peace. When nations as well as individuals learn to give up violence, which is the mark of the brute, his teaching will be looked upon as a landmark in the history of humanity and he will be recognized as a benefactor of the species. His message is not limited to India and Indians. It is addressed to the whole world and to the entire human race.

### Brahmacharya

An understanding of brahmacharya is very important not only to focus on the nature of peace Gandhiji preached and practised, but also to study its implication from the social point of view. According to Gandhiji, brahmacharya is a way of life which leads us to Brahman (God). Celibacy is observance of continence in the quest for God. It includes full control over the process of reproduction. The control must be in thought, word and deed. If thought is not under control, the other two have no value. Gandhiji was always quoting the Hindustani saying, 'He whose heart is pure has the all-purifying waters of the Ganges in his house.'<sup>16</sup>

The brahmacharin of Gandhiji's conception will be healthy and will easily live long.



He will not even suffer from so much as a headache. Mental and physical work will not cause fatigue. He is ever bright, never slothful. His outward neatness will be an exact reflection of the inner cleanliness. He will exhibit all of the steadfastness described in the Bhagavadgita. Gandhiji also raises questions like: 'Is it strange [that one] who is able to completely conserve and sublimate the vital fluid which has the potentiality of creating human beings, should exhibit all the attributes described above? Who can measure the creative strength of such sublimation, one drop of which has the potentiality of bringing into being a human life?' (ibid.).

For Gandhiji, the practice of brahmacharya affects human relations in society in general and within the family in particular. It is a technique of self-restraint. It is a moral means. It has been regarded in his ideology as a method of establishing peace or perfection, in other words, Self-realization. This, however, is a debatable issue in social life.

The social philosophy of Gandhiji is rooted in morality and spirituality. The nature of man is changing very rapidly with the rapid growth in scientific knowledge and industrialization. But the big question is whether man is moving in the right direction. Every rational being in the world feels that our new civilization is facing the problem of moral chaos. Therefore, it is the need of the times to restore peace at any cost. But how should it be done? It has been argued that this may become possible if we delve deep into the understanding of spirituality. But to prove and demonstrate spiritual principles is not easy. No amount of trying is enough to demonstrate the existence of spiritual principles. They can only be felt deep within ourselves (sometimes as moral imperatives) and influence our outlook on life in general.

Gandhiji was at a curiously transitional stage just at the end of the nineteenth century. He was still grappling with the problem of sex, but had begun to think and feel that he could

not fulfil his appointed mission unless he abstained totally from sexual life. This idea, which has a very deep significance in Hinduism, is embodied in the idea of brahmacharya, 'the learning of God', by which is meant self-control and an abnegation of sensual proclivities. Brahmacharya is recommended to all Hindus at the beginning and end of their lives (the first and last of the four stages of human life).<sup>17</sup>

In another form, brahmacharya is a way to realization of Truth, that is God. It is a path to peace. We can restore peace by leading a life of full celibacy.

### Asteya

The fourth vow, non-stealing, has also been advocated by Gandhiji in order to establish peace in society. The practice of non-stealing will have a far-reaching effect in removing injustice from society. While prescribing this vow Gandhiji observed, 'I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use and keep it, I steal it from somebody else.'<sup>18</sup> He also suggested that non-stealing is one of the fundamental laws of nature which should not be violated. Nature produces enough to meet our wants from day to day. According to Gandhiji, there would be no paupers and no man dying of starvation in this world if everybody took just enough for himself and nothing more. Further, he stated that 'so long as we have got this inequality, we are stealing'. He did not want to dispossess those who had possessions, but he did say that those who wanted to come out of darkness and see light had to follow this rule of non-stealing in their lives. As a preacher and practitioner of ahimsa, Gandhiji did not want to rid anybody of their belongings. If anybody possessed more than what he required, Gandhiji said, let him have it; but so far as his own life was concerned, it was regulated. He says,

I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not need. In India we have got millions of

people living on one meal a day, and that meal consisting of a chapati with no fat spread on it and a pinch of salt. You and I have no right to anything more until these millions are clothed and fed better. You and I, who ought to know better, must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation, in order that they may be fed and clothed (ibid.).

In Gandhiji's opinion, one who observes the principle of non-stealing will refuse to bother himself about things to be acquired in future. This evil anxiety for the future will be found at the root of many a theft. Today we only desire possession of a thing, tomorrow we shall begin to adopt measures, straight if possible, crooked when thought necessary, to acquire its possession.<sup>19</sup>

According to Gandhiji, we are not always aware of our real needs and most of us improperly multiply our wants. Thus we unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. One who follows the observance of non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction in his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of the breaches of the principle of non-stealing.<sup>20</sup> One who takes up the observance of non-stealing has to be humble, thoughtful, vigilant and simple in habits.

### Aparigraha

The principle of non-possession is really a part of the principle of non-stealing. Just as one must not receive, so also one must not possess anything that one does not really need. It would be a breach of this principle to possess unnecessary foodstuffs, clothing or furniture. For example, one must not keep a chair that one can do without. In observing this principle one is led to a progressive simplification of one's own life.<sup>21</sup> Non-observance of this principle leads to inequality in society. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, while millions starve to death for want of those very things that are neglected and wasted by the rich. No one would be in want if each retained only that which he genuinely needs, and all would live in content-

ment. Further, Gandhiji observed that from the point of view of pure Truth, the body too is a possession. We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation and learn to use the body for the purpose of service. So service becomes the stuff of life. We eat and drink and even sleep for the sake of service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings about real happiness and peace in society (ibid.).

The establishment of peace in society becomes the destiny of an individual who practises these cardinal principles, according to Gandhiji. In other words, these principles are the means for the restoration of peace in society. Peace requires self-purification and self-purification requires ethical discipline. Gandhiji believes that 'he who is not prepared to order his life in unquestioning obedience to the laws of morality, cannot be said to be a man in the full sense of the word'.<sup>22</sup> The social aspects of peace envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi are grounded in faith in ethical values. He has given these moral principles for observance as vows to humankind in general. Therefore, Gandhiji wants everyone who follows these cardinal vows to be capable of ruling over himself and thus reduce the rule of the state to a minimum. If men and women follow these principles they will come out of the compulsive and coercive rule of the state to which they have been accustomed for centuries.

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### Guns and Self-defence

Our Ashram was finally started [after June 1917] on the bank of the river Sabarmati, near a village called Nava Wadaj. We began by living in tents. Huts were built a little later on. The news of our settling in the Ashram premises reached the thieves round about. They began their nocturnal visits to the Ashram. ... This, however, did not suit us, so we started keeping watch at night. ...

A few days later, Bapu returned from his tour. He took up the subject of thieves for our after-prayer discussion. The matter was well and truly discussed. Then Bapu said: 'If Maganlal (Gandhiji's nephew, and manager of the Ashram) so desires, I can get him a licence from the Government and buy him a gun. And if people start criticizing him, or swearing at us for keeping a gun while we pretend to be lovers of *ahimsa*—well, I am here to answer them.' This again aroused discussion. Bapu said: 'To my mind, it is much better that we keep a gun here for our protection than that we—all of us, men, women and children—go quaking and shivering in fear of our lives all the time. One who is obsessed by fear can never be non-violent. It is better to frighten the thieves away than to indulge in futile mental violence against them.'

We were asked to give our opinion about this proposal. I spoke against our keeping a gun. Everyone was surprised: 'This Maharashtrian, setting himself up as more non-violent than Bapu himself!' That is what I sensed in their attitude. 'I am not now speaking as an upholder of *ahimsa*,' I explained, 'my reasons for opposing this suggestion are quite different. My point is that, today, Bapuji is *persona grata* with the Government. The Government regards him as its friend and well-wisher. So, we are in a position to get not one but four rifles, if we choose. But where are the millions of our peasants to get such weapons from? After all, our peasants have to protect themselves without the help of firearms, so why shouldn't we?' Bapu must have agreed with me, because the matter was dropped there.

Later on, the Government asked Bapu to help them in their war effort, and Bapu toured the Kheda District enlisting recruits for the army. Then he entered into correspondence with the Government, and succeeded in getting a large number of gun-licences for the Kheda peasants. The day I heard of this I was a happy man.

—Kaka Kalelkar

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# Ramakrishna Mission

## Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute

### A Concept Paper

#### Swami Vivekananda's Vision

Swami Vivekananda envisioned that Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, would be a centre of harmony and synthesis, not only of all religious beliefs and traditions, but also of the arts and sciences and the various branches of knowledge, both secular and spiritual. It would be the centre of great spiritual and cultural awakening. In fact, on 2 July 1902, just two days before he passed away, standing on the Belur Math grounds he prophesied: 'The spiritual impact that has come to Belur will last fifteen hundred years, and it will be a great university. Do not think I imagine it; I see it.' In another place, Swami Vivekananda clearly wrote: 'The aim is to gradually develop this Math into an all-round university.' Following Swami Vivekananda we believe that Belur Math and all its large number of branch centres would be centres radiating the light of secular and spiritual education.

In consonance with this vision of Swami Vivekananda, the Mission has established a deemed university, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI).

#### RKMVERI

The present university is intended to realize Swami Vivekananda's fundamental educational ideas on imparting life-building, man-making and character-building education by combining the best elements of the East and the West. He envisioned an educational system wherein the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of our country with its hoary tradition of values like sacredness of knowl-

edge, shraddha and devotion to truth, on the one hand, and the Western values of scientific temper, rational investigation, science and technology, work efficiency, team work and tenacity, on the other, are taught.

#### *Aims and Objectives*

The aim of the institute is to provide opportunities for education and research in the disciplines of arts, sciences and spiritual studies. Arts will include humanities and social sciences; sciences will include fundamental and applied sciences of all categories as well as technology; and spiritual studies will comprise moral, ethical and value education, and comparative religious studies in their broadest form. The supplementary and interdependent character of these three disciplines will receive special emphasis in this university. Thus there would be science-based arts and spiritual studies as well as sciences complemented by arts and spiritual studies. Value education will therefore be an essential component in all the courses.

#### *Actualizing the Vision*

To start with, this institute would have some major thrust areas not usually covered by other universities in India. These are meant to meet two distinct kinds of needs:

1) Need-based and job-oriented professional development courses aimed essentially at addressing the masses and marginalized sections of society. These courses would, in large measure, enable the students to give themselves the jobs they seek rather than seek them from others. They would also 'enable them to stand on their own feet', to put it in the

words of Swami Vivekananda.

2) Culturally, morally and ethically enriching value-orientating courses aimed at addressing all the stakeholders in the field of education, including parents.

The courses offered will be designed accordingly. Although the university would begin by operating in the gap areas not usually covered or emphasized by other conventional universities (see under 'Major Thrust Areas'), courses of the more usual type, particularly in emergent disciplines like information and communications, microbiology, bioinformatics and biotechnology, and nanoscience and nanotechnology will also be on the anvil and may be gradually started over the years.

### **Distinctive Features:**

#### **A University with a Difference**

##### *Administrative Aspects*

Although Belur Math is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, under whose guidance and overall administrative control all the branch centres function, the actual implementation of the policies adopted by the headquarters and the activities flowing therefrom are, for the most part, monitored by the branch centres under the supervision of their respective heads, who, in turn, are appointed by the headquarters. The newly formed deemed university under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Mission, its parent body, will also have its central administrative office at Belur Math.

Thus the institute will be an international university that could operate from and through any of the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Mission in India and abroad. Its deemed-university character does not mean that it is a single institution located in a particular campus. Rather, it is a cluster of institutions, all of them belonging to the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Mission. In this sense, the university is a deemed university with a difference. This fundamental and unique fea-

ture of the university having been understood, the other academic and administrative details follow as a matter of logical consequence.

##### *Major Thrust Areas*

The four thrust areas chosen to be the major faculties of the university have received little attention in other Indian universities. The Ramakrishna Mission has been working for decades in these areas and therefore has the necessary expertise, both theoretical and practical, and branch centres with experience in these fields could easily become 'specialized faculty centres' with sufficient augmentation of infrastructure, faculty, etc. to enable them to rise to the university level. The four contemplated thrust areas are:

- Disability Management and Special Education
- Integrated Rural Development including Tribal Development
- Indian Cultural and Spiritual Heritage and Value Education
- Disaster Management including Relief and Rehabilitation

##### *Specialized Faculty Centres*

For each of these thrust areas, there will be a separate specialized faculty centre (popularly called nodal centre). To start with, branch centres of the Ramakrishna Mission already specializing in these areas, as mentioned above, have been chosen to act as nodal centres. The nodal centres corresponding to the four thrust areas would be as follows:

- *Disability Management and Special Education*: International Human Resource Development Centre for the Disabled at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, which is already involved in training Special Education professionals at the national and international levels.
- *Integrated Rural Development and Tribal Development*: Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi, Jharkhand; Ramakrishna

Mission Lokasiksha Parishad, Narendrapur, West Bengal; Ramakrishna Mission Samaj Sevak Sikshanamandira, Belur, Howrah, West Bengal.

- *Indian Spiritual and Cultural Heritage and Value Education*: Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore, Karnataka.

- *Disaster Management including Relief and Rehabilitation*: A suitable Ramakrishna Mission centre.

The following branch centres, which have fairly adequate facilities, could also be thought of as additional specialized faculty centres to be included later on:

- *Disability Management*: Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys' Academy, Narendrapur, West Bengal.

- *Tribal Development*: Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama (Abujmarh Tribal Service), Narainpur, Bastar, Chhattisgarh; Ramakrishna Mission Ashramas at Cherrapunji and Shillong in Meghalaya; Ramakrishna Mission centres at Along, Itanagar and Narottam Nagar in Arunachal Pradesh.

- *Indian Spiritual and Cultural Heritage and Value-based Education*: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, West Bengal; Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence, Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh; Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.

#### *Vivekananda Research Centre*

The Vivekananda Research Centre for fundamental science and philosophy will be housed in Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House in Kolkata to conduct research on various aspects of Indian culture and philosophy, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought, Vedanta vis-à-vis modern science, consciousness studies and some areas of fundamental science. Among the fundamental sciences contemplated are theoretical physics, pure mathematics and theoretical computer science, to start with.

One central purpose of the research conducted in this centre will be to study, explicate and interpret the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda in the context of the philosophies, social institutions and religious traditions of India and the rest of the world, so that people all over the world regardless of the distinctions of caste, creed, or race may derive benefit from these lives and teachings and help to build an enlightened, prosperous and peaceful global society.

In addition to the above, research in fundamental science will also receive some emphasis in this research centre, for Swami Vivekananda was the pioneer in initiating research in fundamental science in India. It was he who suggested to Sir Jamshedji Tata to start a research institute in India for fundamental science in order to inculcate a scientific temper and objective research orientation in the Indian psyche.

In fact, any branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission or any other institution with adequate infrastructure and other facilities working with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology could be gradually added to start newer faculties and be designated as a specialized centre for that faculty. As new specialized faculty centres come up, the size of the university will keep expanding, but the principle will remain the same: all the specialized faculty centres, along with the administrative office at Belur Math, will together constitute the Vivekananda (Deemed) University.

In each discipline, necessary appointments of professors, readers and lecturers, in addition to administrative staff, will be made on contract/part-time basis according to UGC norms. Since each of the above centres is an active institution functioning over years with already well-developed infrastructure and trained faculty and staff, it should be possible to raise them to the university level with suitable augmentation and reinforcement of infrastructure, as may be necessary to maintain

UGC standards. Courses started de novo might require some structural changes, which are not difficult to make. Thus, in each of the disciplines (or thrust areas identified above), the university will have the required number of core faculty members, who could be supplemented by some specialist visiting faculty to teach certain specialized topics.

### **Academic Aspects:**

#### **Courses, Teaching and Evaluation**

The university will have the semester academic system with provision for summer courses.

#### *Types of Courses*

The university will concentrate on two types of courses: long-term courses leading to diploma, postgraduate diploma, graduation, postgraduation and research, and short-term programmes ranging from three-day orientation/refresher courses to certificate courses of six months' duration. While the long-term courses aim at preparing specialists in the thrust areas, the short-term programmes will aim at orienting and building the capacity of existing teachers, community members and other persons holding responsible positions in society, by exposing them to ideas they have not learnt in their school, college or university curricula. Measures will also be devised to expose them to contemporary ideas in emerging disciplines, so that they can make significant contributions in these areas, given their already well-developed expertise in their respective fields of specialization.

Though short-term in-service programmes and certificate courses do not normally come under the purview of universities as such, the Vivekananda (Deemed) University proposes to bring these programmes too under the university system by offering credits which can be accumulated over a period of time by the learner. These credits will be transferable to long-term programmes when needed.

#### *Study Centres or Off-campus Centres*

The specialized faculty centres will identify suitable institutions in India and abroad to function as study centres, offering courses under the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda (Deemed) University. These will be off-campus centres offering courses as a part of distance education with the permission of the Distance Education Council. This mode will be taken up in a couple of years' time. Meanwhile, suitable study materials and necessary infrastructure will be developed. Normally, these study centres will be located at centres affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission or at institutions working with the same ideology as the Mission and under its general guidance and advice. Thus the university can reach a large section of society, young and old, through its off-campus mode of education. In fact, the university will concentrate on this mode so that a large number of people in India and abroad would be benefited.

Of the four thrust areas stated above, the university will begin with Disability Management and Special Education through its nodal centre in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, as advised by the UGC and notified by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Further, Disaster Management including Relief and Rehabilitation is an emerging discipline, and although the Mission has been doing extensive post-disaster management in the form of relief and rehabilitation for over a century, it has to do some serious planning before starting courses, both theoretical and practical, on pre-disaster management, it being a new field that has been emerging in recent times.

Though each of the faculty centres specializes in one area, they may also serve as off-campus centres for courses offered by other faculties. For example, the Coimbatore centre, which will serve as the main specialized faculty centre for Disability Management and Special Education, may also become one of the off-campus centres for courses dealing

with Value Education, Integrated Rural Development, and so on. These off-campus centres may start functioning once the concept of distance education is implemented, which could be during the second or third year of establishment of the university.

### *System of Credit Accumulation*

The deemed university will offer its courses through a system of credit accumulation, thereby enabling students to learn at their own pace. The courses in all four thrust areas will be categorized as core courses, practical-oriented courses and stand-alone independent courses. The award of credits for theory and practical hours will be decided by the academic council and the boards of studies to be constituted by the university.

### *General Evaluation Strategies*

Separate boards of studies will be constituted for the various disciplines. These boards will look into the overall curriculum for each course, question paper patterns, practical activities, etc. However, the following general guidelines will be followed in evaluating the courses of the university:

- Programmes offered through distance mode will have specific credits for contact programmes, project activities, and practical and independent study.
- Attendance, as per requisite norms, at the contact classes will be made compulsory for each of the courses.
- Internal and external systems of evaluation will be in place and the boards of studies will recommend the ratio of internal : external weightage.
- Examinations will be conducted twice a year and the in-built flexibility of the credit accumulation system will give the students the freedom to complete the course over a certain span of time.
- The respective boards of studies and expert committees will be responsible for deciding on these aspects.

### **Vivekananda (Deemed) University: a Movement More than an Academy**

Life-building, man-making, character-building education being Swami Vivekananda's watchword, the deemed university will persuade every one of its students to acquire a certain number of credits in value education, irrespective of the course he or she might be studying. For the first and foremost requirement of any country is educated men and women of impeccable integrity—wholesome human beings with head, hand and heart harmoniously developed, rather than merely knowledgeable and skilful engineers, doctors or computer scientists lacking in feeling and dedication.

Swami Vivekananda envisioned a glorious future India arising out the hard work and sacrifice of millions of her children—men and women who are sincere and honest to the backbone, with 'brains to conceive, hearts to feel and hands to work'. Endowed with brilliant and luminous intellects, loving and overflowing hearts, energetic and efficient hands, the children of Mother India educated in a new ethos of self-sacrifice rather than self-aggrandizement will revivify and resuscitate our country to her past glory. This was one of Swami Vivekananda's favourite visions. To this end, the proposed university bearing his hallowed name would inspire young men and women to work for the actualization of this vision.

Thus, the deemed university, being under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Mission, a worldwide movement silently serving people in various spheres for over a century, should also be contemplated as a *movement* rather than a mere academic institution. It is our fervent hope that the students trained in it will not be mere academicians and scholars, but participants in the enormous task of nation building—rebuilding India by building individual character cast in the mould of harmony and synthesis of knowledge, love and work. \*



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# The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to Suresh Chandra Datta

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

## The Life of Suresh Chandra Datta

**S**uresh Chandra Datta, one of the recorders of Ramakrishna's gospel, was born in west Calcutta in 1850. From his boyhood Suresh was honest, humble, simple, and self-reliant. He was a highly educated and talented man. From time to time Suresh would attend Keshab Chandra Sen's lectures with Durgacharan Nag, a neighbour. At night they would meditate with Keshab's devotees on the bank of the Ganges. Durgacharan longed for God and sought a guru to guide him.

Every evening Suresh went to Durgacharan's house to discuss religion. Suresh was a staunch follower of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj, which advocated belief in God without form. Like Christians, Brahmos considered God as formless but full of divine qualities: God is omnipotent and omniscient, merciful and forgiving, kind and loving, and so on. Durgacharan, however, was an orthodox Hindu who obeyed every scriptural injunction. The two men had heated religious discussions every evening, but their different views were never reconciled. During one of their friendly squabbles, Durgacharan said to Suresh: 'The gods and goddesses of the Hindus as well as the formless Brahman are all true. But attaining Brahman is so difficult, I doubt whether one or two in a million can ever reach this stage. Hence arises the necessity of believing in the various gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Do you think that the Vedas, Puranas, Tantras, and mantras are all false?' Suresh retorted: 'Uncle, set aside your scriptures. I have no faith in them.'

Fortunately, during one of his visits to the Brahmo Samaj, Suresh happened to hear

about Ramakrishna, the saint of Dakshineswar. He waited for two months before he suggested to Durgacharan that they visit the Master. After lunch that very day, they left for Dakshineswar.

It was a hot summer day in April or May, probably in 1883. They arrived at Dakshineswar at 2:00 p.m. Both men were delighted by the panoramic view of the temple garden, and they enjoyed its peaceful atmosphere. Ramakrishna received them graciously and asked them to sit down. He talked to them for some time. In the course of conversation, Ramakrishna said: 'Live in this world like a mudfish. There is nothing wrong in staying at home. The mudfish lives in the mud but is not soiled by it. Similarly, live in this world but never be contaminated by its evils.'<sup>1</sup> Then Ramakrishna sent them to the Panchavati grove to meditate. After half an hour they returned to the Master's room, and Ramakrishna took them round to the various temples in the Dakshineswar compound. He first walked to the twelve Shiva temples and prostrated before each deity, circumambulating their respective shrines. Durgacharan followed the Master's example, but Suresh merely looked on, for he had no faith in Hindu gods and goddesses.

Ramakrishna next took them to the Krishna and Kali temples. Both Suresh and Durgacharan were astonished by the ecstatic mood that came over the Master when he entered the Kali temple. As a restless child holds on to the hem of its mother's garment and moves around her, so the Master went round the image of Kali and prostrated before Her. About 5:00 p.m., after returning to the Mas-

ter's room, Suresh and Durgacharan took their leave. Ramakrishna gave them this parting advice: 'Come again. Our acquaintance will grow deeper if you keep coming regularly for some time.'

The experience of that first meeting left an indelible impression on their minds, and they could not help but talk about Ramakrishna. The next week they both visited the Master again. On seeing these two sincere seekers, Ramakrishna exclaimed in an ecstatic mood: 'You have done well in coming again. I have been waiting here for you for a long time.' The Master once again asked them to meditate in the Panchavati grove.

Suresh visited the Master eight or nine times with Durgacharan. Undoubtedly he must have visited Ramakrishna many more times alone or with others, otherwise he could not have collected so many of the Master's teachings. He published these teachings in a book during Ramakrishna's lifetime. Suresh was not the first to record and publish Ramakrishna's teachings, but the second.

In 1885, during the Afghan War, Suresh was given a job in a military department that paid a monthly salary of two hundred rupees. He was assigned to Quetta, in the north-western part of India. Before his departure from Calcutta, Durgacharan urged Suresh to receive initiation from the Master. But Suresh had no faith in mantras or in God with form. After a prolonged discussion with Durgacharan on this point, they agreed that Suresh should abide by the Master's wishes.

The next day both men went to Dakshineswar, and Durgacharan raised the question of initiation. 'Yes, Durgacharan is right,' Ramakrishna said to Suresh. 'A person should practise spiritual disciplines under the direction of a guru. What prevents you from admitting this?' 'Sir, I have no faith in mantras,' replied Suresh humbly. 'All right,' said the Master. 'Don't worry about it now. Everything will come in time' (235).

In Quetta it was not long before Suresh

began to feel the need for initiation very keenly. He continued his spiritual disciplines as usual. During this time an ugly incident tested his strength of character. Suresh was extremely honest. His manager tried to embezzle some money, and he asked Suresh to sign false bills. Suresh refused, and as a result he was forced to resign and return to Calcutta.

One day in 1886 Suresh went to see Ramakrishna at the Cossipore garden house. The Master was then bedridden because of his illness. He asked Suresh: 'Where is your doctor friend [Durgacharan]? He is said to be a good physician. Tell him to come here sometime soon' (236). Seeing the Master's fragile condition, Suresh could not bring himself to ask for initiation. Instead, he went home and informed Durgacharan that the Master wanted to see him.

After the Master's passing on 16 August 1886, Suresh regretted not having followed his friend's advice about asking for initiation. He lamented his poor decision and passed his nights in prayer and meditation on the bank of the Ganges. One night he fell asleep while crying to God on the riverbank. Sometime before daybreak the next morning he dreamt that Ramakrishna had come out of the water and approached him, and then uttered a mantra in his ear. As Suresh was about to take the dust of Ramakrishna's feet, he disappeared. At this point, Suresh's life changed and he became an ardent devotee of the Master.

### A Brief Biography of Ramakrishna

Suresh Chandra Datta wrote a small biography<sup>2</sup> as an introduction to his collection of the Master's teachings, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-dever Upadesh*. In this biography he published some wonderful stories about the Master. I present some of these stories here.

*Kshudiram's vision:* Before Ramakrishna was born, his father, Kshudiram, had a vision of Vishnu in which the god said He would be born as his son.

*Ramakrishna's early days in Dakshineswar:*

The Master had a wonderful relationship with Rani Rasmani, the founder of the Kali temple, and her son-in-law Mathur. Ramakrishna practised Tantra, Vedanta, and various other spiritual disciplines. He eventually realized God by practising different spiritual disciplines and religions. Due to his intense longing, he had his first vision of the Divine Mother.

*Ramakrishna's renunciation:* To test his purity, Mathur once took the Master to visit some alluring young women. But the Master had renounced lust. As soon as the Master saw the women, he addressed them as 'Oh, my blissful mothers,' and then went into samadhi. They were embarrassed and begged forgiveness from the Master, asking him to bless them. Ramakrishna had also given up money; he could not even touch it. Saying 'Money is clay and clay is money,' he threw a rupee and a clod of dirt into the Ganges. When Mathur offered money and property to him, the Master was so angry that he almost hit Mathur.

*Ramakrishna's childlike nature:* The Master was a true paramahansa, so his nature was childlike. Once in ecstasy, while trying to embrace Lord Krishna, he fell and broke his right arm. He cried like a boy and was deeply distressed. But he had the faith of a child. During that time a man came from Calcutta and said, 'Sir, your hand will be all right. It will heal.' The Master was immediately relieved. He told his visitors: 'Look, this man has come from Calcutta and says that my hand will be all right. So I will be all right.'

Once he saw steamers passing on the Ganges, and a desire arose to see a steamer up close and find out how its engine made that *jhak jhak* sound. He was a real paramahansa; so his nature was childlike.

*The Master's Vaishnava sadhana:* When Ramakrishna was practising spiritual disciplines in the mood of Radha, he dressed and acted like a woman. When he practised the servant attitude towards Ramachandra, he behaved like Hanuman. While practising humil-

ity, he cleaned the privy at the Dakshineswar temple garden. Although he was a brahmin priest, he did not consider himself to be higher than the untouchable sweeper.

*The Master as an avatara:* In the course of time, Ramakrishna became known among Calcutta people through Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijaykrishna Goswami, and other Brahmo leaders. The famous scholars Pandit Vaishnavcharan, Pandit Gauri, and Pandit Padmalochan all recognized him as an avatara.

Once a great scholar visited Dakshineswar to evaluate Ramakrishna's spirituality. The Master was in his room, surrounded by his devotees. The scholar entered the room and asked: 'Are you a paramahansa?' He found the Master seated on a soft bed, with a bolster at his back. He saw the Master's shoes and other articles in his room. He then sat on the Master's bed and told the devotees: 'You have come from Calcutta to see a paramahansa! You are all deceived by this man. I have read the scriptures and I know the signs of a paramahansa.' He then quoted the scripture where the signs of a paramahansa are mentioned. Disgusted, the scholar left the room; he had expected Ramakrishna to be an austere hermit. The scholar went to the bank of the Ganges to practise his evening meditation. While he was concentrating on his Chosen Ideal, he had a vision. He immediately rushed to the Master and found him in samadhi. The scholar stood in front of Ramakrishna and exclaimed with folded hands: 'You are God!' (75-77).

When he talked about God, the Master would merge into samadhi. He lost consciousness of the outside world, his face would beam with a sweet smile, and tears would trickle from his eyes. Only after hearing the Lord's name would he become normal again. Pointing to his picture, Ramakrishna said: 'In the future, I will be worshipped in many homes.'

*Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh*

As mentioned earlier, Suresh met Rama-

krishna in 1883. After associating with him for a couple of years, he discovered that the Master's teachings were more precious than gems and jewels. He felt that the words of the Master must be recorded. He had heard many sermons at the Brahmo Samaj and had read its literature. Ramakrishna's simple, convincing words and examples, stories and parables made a deep impression on his mind. He asked some of the Master's close disciples who lived with him to record his teachings. But the disciples were too absorbed in the bliss of the Master's holy presence and overwhelmed by his personality to do such a thing at that time.

So, driven by evangelical inspiration, Suresh began recording the teachings of the Master that he heard directly from him. Haramohan Mitra, another householder disciple of the Master, had some experience in publishing. He came forward to help Suresh, and in December 1884 he published 100 of the Master's teachings while Ramakrishna was still alive. The second part, which comprised another 100 teachings, came out in 1886. Inspired, Suresh started collecting even more of the Master's teachings from other disciples who had heard them directly from the Master. Thus Suresh collected 600 teachings. In 1894 he combined all of the teachings he had collected and added a biography of the Master. Thus *Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh* came into existence. The rapid sale of the book inspired both Haramohan and Suresh. Over time, Suresh added to his collection; the book now contains 950 teachings.<sup>3</sup> These wonderful teachings of Ramakrishna have not yet been translated into English in their entirety. Some stories and teachings appear in different forms in *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* (published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata) and *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (published by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai).

Suresh wrote in the introduction that if anybody could prove that any of the teachings or stories in his collection were not true, or dis-

torted or exaggerated, he would make corrections in the next edition. He did not accept any second-hand information. Moreover, he verified the information that he collected by checking with at least one other source. He did not interpret the Master's teachings because he wanted to let the readers understand Ramakrishna in their own way.

Suresh died in 1912.

### Some Teachings from

#### *Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh*

1. You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O human beings, because you do not find God in your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

581. God dwells in all beings, but all beings do not identify themselves with God, so they suffer.

567. Some people shed a jugful of tears to have children; some cry for money and property; but who longs to see God? Those who want God, find Him.

569. In this Kaliyuga a human being can attain perfection in three days. Those who cry with a longing heart for God day and night see Him.

11. Question: 'How can one ascertain the state of perfection?'

Answer: 'As potatoes and eggplants become soft when they are boiled, so people become very soft or humble when they attain perfection. Their egos dissolve completely.'

30. A room may be dark for a thousand years, but it is lighted instantly as soon as a lamp is lit. Similarly, one glance of God's grace can wipe away sins accumulated in thousands of births.

160. If one drops a salt doll, a cloth doll, and a stone doll in the ocean, the salt doll melts instantly and loses its individual existence. The cloth doll becomes soaked with water; it does not become one with it, and it maintains its own separate existence. Water does not en-

ter into the stone doll at all. A free soul is like the salt doll, a worldly soul is like the cloth doll, and a bound soul is like the stone doll.

157. The sun may shine equally everywhere, but it reflects more clearly in clean water, mirrors, and other transparent objects. Similarly, God may dwell in every heart, but He manifests more completely in the hearts of holy people.

234. Tears of repentance and tears of joy come out from opposite corners of the eyes: the former from the inner corner and the latter from the outer corner.

235. Question: 'Nowadays many preachers are preaching religion. What do you think of them?'

Answer: 'It is like a man who has food for one person, but he has invited one hundred. After practising a little sadhana, he has started to make money by initiating disciples like a professional guru.'

236. Question: 'What is real preaching?'

Answer: 'Real preaching requires that one be absorbed in God before preaching spirituality to others. He who tries to make himself free, preaches well. Hundreds of people from all directions come to one who is free and they ask for instruction. When the flowers bloom, bees come of their own accord.'

303. Let the boat be in the water, but not water in the boat. Let a spiritual aspirant live in the world, but let not worldliness enter inside him.

364. The same God manifested here as Krishna and manifested there as Jesus.

383. God laughs twice. When two brothers divide the land, saying, 'This part is mine and that part is yours,' God laughs. He says to Himself, 'The whole universe belongs to Me, but they say they own this portion or that portion.' When the physician says to a patient's mother, 'Don't be afraid, mother; I shall certainly cure your boy,' God laughs. He says to Himself, 'I am going to take his life, and this man says he will save it!'

376. When shall I be free? When 'I' ceases to be. If 'I' wants to remain, let it stay as a servant-I of God.

405. Neither sin nor mercury can be hidden.

406. One who eats radish belches radish; one who eats cucumber belches cucumber. What is inside a person comes out through his or her speech.

471. One cannot see God without renouncing lust and gold.

570. Question: 'What should I do with bad thoughts?'

Answer: 'Let bad thoughts arise in the mind; they cannot do any harm until you do something wrong.'

593. Once the Master said, 'If you want to understand after hearing one sentence, come to me. And if you want to understand after hearing a million sentences, go to Keshab Chandra Sen.' A man asked him, 'Please give me knowledge in one sentence.' He said, '*Jagat mūhya brahma satya*;' This world is impermanent and Brahman is real.'

621. One cannot achieve anything if there is any theft in the chamber of the heart [meaning hypocrisy].

688. Friend, as long as I live so long do I learn.

720. As many faiths, so many paths. Have steadfast devotion to your path, but never hate or criticize the paths of others.

744. God loves simplicity. Call on Him with a simple and pure mind. You will then surely find Him (21-208). \*

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2. Suresh Chandra Datta, *Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Jivani o Upadesh* (Calcutta, 1908), 1-82.
3. *Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh*, comp. Suresh Chandra Datta (Calcutta: Haramohan Publishing, 1968).

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# Glimpses of Holy Lives

Sadhu Kishandas

In 1908 or 1909, Mahendranath Datta, writes, he was staying at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban. The Sevashrama, which was then located on the banks of the Yamuna, consisted of a few small mud houses with tin roofing. Since it was a *sevashrama*, not just a hospital, special attention was given to making the patients feel at home. The idea was that more than the medical treatment it was the caring attitude of the nurses that restored patients to health. Here Mahendranath would sit by the patients' beds and engage them in light talk in order to divert their minds away from their suffering.

Most of the patients at the Sevashrama were simple-hearted Vaishnava sadhus and Mahendranath made acquaintance with a number of them. None of them, however, attracted him as much as a thin, dark-complexioned sadhu did. Every sentence that this sadhu spoke was so sweet and full of humility. It was as if the sadhu's heart was brimming with love but he lacked the ability to express it fully—as if a lamp was burning brightly inside but did not show through adequately. Mahendranath would feel happy whenever he talked to this sadhu. Within a few days of his arrival a close bond was established between the sadhu and the Sevashrama workers—so much so that they almost forgot that he was a sadhu and began to treat him like a member of their own family.

The sadhu's name was Kishandasji; he belonged to the Ramanuja sect.

## A Strange Punishment

Vaishnavas as a community are very fastidious in matters of food and drink, and the Ramanuja sect was doubly so. When Kishandasji returned to his ashrama after getting well

he was obliged to go through a ritual of 'purification' for having stayed at the Sevashrama, where he could not have been strict about what he ate and from whose hands! What was the penance? Poor Kishandasji had to give a feast to the sadhus of his ashrama. He had no choice but to accept the ruling handed down to him before he could return to his community.

But Kishandasji felt deeply hurt. The feast he gave was not an occasion for joy; it was a kind of punishment. If truth be told, Kishandasji himself was a strict Vaishnava sadhu. But he was a spiritually developed soul too. Probably he was just ripe for a major transformation in his attitude. During his month-long stay at the Sevashrama a palpable change had come over him. He had appreciated and enjoyed the liberal outlook of the people at the Sevashrama, and because of their loving service his own squeamishness about food and drink had dissolved. He now disliked fanaticism of any kind. In other words, he had outgrown the stage where rules and regulations are important.

## Kishandasji's Mite

Kishandasji was a staunch devotee of Rama, but he now developed an equal devotion to Sri Ramakrishna also thanks to his stay in the Sevashrama. He began to visit the place regularly and offer flowers and garlands at the shrine. He had a secret desire to offer some sweets too but did not have the money.

One day somebody gave him five paise as alms. Kishandasji went to the Sevashrama and, handing over the coin at the shrine, said that he wished to offer some sweets to Sri Ramakrishna. But five paise was a negligible amount of money. 'You don't have to pay us

for the offering,' he was told. 'Keep the money. We will offer something to Thakur in your name.' Kishandasji was sad beyond words. With folded hands he uttered, 'I am such an unfortunate soul that Thakur will not accept my offering!' Mahendranath and his colleagues came to their senses: 'Are we not all equal in God's eyes? Does God distinguish between rich and poor? Indeed, that person who has devotion for His lotus feet is rich, and whoever lacks that is poor!' Then they said: 'It is all right, Kishanji, your money is accepted. Now let us know what you want to offer.' Kishandasji expressed his wish. 'All right, it will be offered to Thakur tomorrow evening, and you too will have your prasada here. Whatever else needs to go with your offering will be provided from the ashrama; you need have no compunctions about it.'

After this incident Kishandasji grew even more close to the Sevashrama and his visits increased in frequency.

*Patram, pushpam, phalam, toyam ...*

With the love of God will come, as a sure effect, the love of every one in the universe. The nearer we approach God, the more do we begin to see that all things are in Him. When the soul succeeds in appropriating the bliss of this supreme love, it also begins to see Him in everything. Our heart will thus become an eternal fountain of love. And when we reach even higher states of this love, all the little differences between the things of the world are entirely lost; man is seen no more as man, but only as God ... *Evam sarveṣu bhūteṣu bhaktiravyabhicārinī; Kartavyā paṇḍitairjñātvā sarvabhūtamayaṁ harim.* —'Knowing that Hari, the Lord, is in every being, the wise have thus to manifest unswerving love towards all beings.'

Kishandasji's life is an illustration of the above-quoted words of Swami Vivekananda.

North India experiences blazing summers with hot winds blowing across the plains. Then places like Vrindaban become positively fiery. In those days drinking water was a problem during the season, especially along the Mathura-Vrindaban highway, since

all the wells were situated well off the road inside villages. In order to relieve the thirst of pilgrims, well-to-do people of the area used to provide drinking water for them. Usually a young brahmin boy or a brahmin widow was entrusted with the job of dispensing cool water from a barrel placed outside the house by the roadside. This practice of providing cool drinking water to weary pilgrims was known as *piya*.

One summer Kishandasji desired to keep a *piya* himself and serve the pilgrims. But where was he to get the money for a barrel? He was too poor to serve others! Moreover, his residence—if one could call it that—was quite a distance from the highway. But love surmounts all obstacles. Kishandasji would fetch water from a distant well in a jar and, sitting by the road, would call the passers-by affectionately and offer them cool, sweet water. Obviously, he had to make several trips to the well each day in the burning sun! So great was Kishandasji's humility and sincerity, so deep his feeling for others, that onlookers could feel that he was worshipping God Himself.

Late one afternoon Mahendranath and a few of his friends were out for a walk. A little beyond the Govindji temple they spotted Kishandasji, who was very happy to give them a drink of water from his jar. Mahendranath felt blessed. After having his drink he sprinkled a few drops of that water on his head, as he would do with Ganga water!

This may not be much of a story. Two short paragraphs is all it takes to describe Kishandasji's attitude of service. But as Swami Vivekananda says: 'If you cannot see God in the human face, how can you see him in the clouds, or in images made of dull, dead matter, or in mere fictitious stories of our brain? I shall call you religious from the day you begin to see God in men and women.' It is significant that these words occur in his second lecture on 'Practical Vedanta'.

*(To be continued)*



## Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

### **The Essence of Bhagavadgita in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.**

*Braja D Mookherjee.* Academic Publishers, 12/1A Bankim Chatterjee Street, Kolkata 700 073. E-mail: [acabooks@cal.vsnl.net.in](mailto:acabooks@cal.vsnl.net.in). 2002. xxi + 501 pp. Rs 200.

Sri Adi Shankara said: *Geyam gītā nāmasahasram*; keep studying the Gita and reciting the *Vishnu Sahasranama*. These two scriptures expel the evil that dwells within us, illumine the spiritual spaces and engage us in purposive action. Braja Mookherjee's exposition of the Gita is not going to be the last word. Many more will come and the thought makes us happy: what a united endeavour down the centuries to realize the Supreme and learn the art of living!

Though there have been commentaries on the Gita inspired by the manifestation and ministry of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Mookherjee's is important for the researcher as he gives us references to whatever quotation he has used from the two great savants. At the very outset is what would probably be, for many readers, a new bit of information about the Gita. Just prior to the conversation which forms the present Gita in the Mahabharata, Krishna asks Arjuna to pray to Durga. Arjuna comes down the chariot, joins his hands in prayer and recites a Durga stotra. Mookherjee actually takes us to the Bhadrakali temple at Kurukshetra where the devout throw four clay horses into a nearby well even today, because according to a legend prevalent in those parts Arjuna sacrificed his four horses in order to win the war. Apart from such interesting information in the Introduction, we also have some obscure statements as the following on the verse form of the scripture which appear to be a misunderstanding of the Sanskrit metre used by Vyasa: 'Gita's verse is blank; but contrary to the blank-verse rule, the Gita's slokas rhyme, as we mentioned before. To make it more rhythmic, the great Gita-poet constructed some compound words in each sloka.'

But these inchoate opinions need not detain us from going to the actual text, which is very well endowed with appropriate quotes from Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and a few other savants. Whoever decided upon the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* deserves our eternal gratitude. Both Krishna and Ramakrishna teach us with unerring precision: 'Man is born in the world to realize God.' *The Essence of Bhagavadgita* helps us in this endeavour to seek the Purushottama and remain free from fear by chanting the Lord's names. That is the best way to overcome the terror of Kali Yuga.

*Dr Prema Nandakumar*  
Researcher and Literary Critic  
Srirangam

**The Mahabharata War.** *Swami Siddhinathananda.* Saikripa Prasadam, Kallai, Kozhikode 673 008. 2000. 144 pp. Rs 72.

Since their appearance on the globe humans have been involved in innumerable wars. These have varied in dimension and magnitude. The Mahabharata war, however, was a total war between cousins for the right of inheritance of the Hastinapura throne. Now the point is, was it an ordinary war like others that the world has seen? There are two opinions about this. According to some, it was the usual kind of battle between two forces supported by their own relatives. But according to many, it was a *dharma yuddha* between the forces of good and evil.

Indian nationality is rooted in the Vedic vision. Its foundation is laid strong by Vyasa, the bard of the Mahabharata. A line in the epic truly describes the work's greatness: '*Yadīhāsti tadanyatra, yan-nēhāsti na tat kvacit*'; What is found here is found elsewhere, and what is not found here cannot be found anywhere else.' The lesson that the epic teaches us, to borrow from the Bhagavadgita, is this: '*Anityamasukhaṁ lokamīnaṁ prāpya bhajasva mām*'; Having entered this impermanent sorrowful



world, do thou worship Me.' This is the real essence of the Mahabharata: No power but the love of God can save man from death and destruction.

The Mahabharata says, 'the Gita comprises all the scriptures' ('Bhishma Parva', 44.4). It is the very life breath, the heart, the verbal image of the Lord. No sacrifice, charity, austerity, pilgrimage or religious vow can stand comparison with the study of the Gita. Sri Krishna uttered parts of His discourse in verse, which the compiler, Maharshi Vyasa, recorded exactly as they came out from the Lord's lips. The parts uttered in prose were verified by Vyasa, as were the words of Arjuna, Sanjaya and Dhritarashtra, and the Gita was made an organic part of the Mahabharata.

But among the world's literature, the epic stands in a class by itself. A perennial fountain of superb poetry and a saga of races and generations, it offers a great insight into the forces that work within the human psyche and into the forces that move the universe. History and geography, religion and philosophy, the arts and sciences, architecture and politics—all are here encyclopedically presented in the form of tales and anecdotes, discourses and debates, narratives and lyrics.

The author of *The Mahabharata War* has successfully executed the gigantic task of presenting the gist of 1,25,000 verses in 132 pages—a valuable gift indeed to people who have time only for 'capsules' of wisdom and poetry—while still preserving the flavour and potency of the original work. Rendering a text like the Mahabharata is difficult, to say the least, but Siddhinathanandaji's book is a perfect blend of grandeur and simplicity. One will find in it the food to sustain one on the ultimate journey towards the liberation of the soul. The literary artistry combined with the dramatic interest of the story as presented here will undoubtedly charm the educated and enlightened reader.

*Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty*

Former Head, Department of Philosophy  
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**The Experience of Nothingness.** Ed. Robert Powell. Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com) 2003. x + 166 pp. Rs 175.

The title of this book is indicative of the content. How can one experience nothingness? In this record of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's 'Talks on Re-

alizing the Infinite', concepts of perception, objects of perception, awareness and consciousness are discussed threadbare and the reader is made to re-think and go beyond cultivated thought patterns. The editor clearly specifies the way in which the reader is to 'digest' the discourses rather than go through them. To quote: 'Optimally, small portions of the text should be digested at any one time, in order to let their significance sink in. Thus, one uses Maharaj more like a catalyst in the flowering of one's own understanding and the consequent development of one's convictions.'

The whole gamut of experiencing the indivisible consciousness is dealt with in stages spread over ten chapters. The first chapter introduces the line of thought and the basic concepts are made clear. The whole problem lies in identification with the individual body and consequently with the individual. Therefore the individual is ever afraid of death; death of the individual.... You are this consciousness. And out of this consciousness is born the entire universe.... And that which is unlimited we have limited to an insignificant thing.' These words succinctly point out the fundamentals of Vedantic thought. Spiritual experience alone can provide one with insights into the nature of things, and Maharaj is very explicit when he says, 'Where the basic knowledge is concerned, which I deal with, why do these people remain speechless? Because it is something totally different from anything that can be understood. Whatever is understood, whatever is seen, is not true.' As Sri Ramakrishna says, we limit the limitless by trying to define and express it verbally.

Each chapter guides the seeker after truth with brilliant insights. Maharaj, however, does not deny preliminaries and insists that they are essential. 'Until you meet your own Self, "I am," they [the disciplines] are all very necessary. Once you abide in your own self they are useless ....' This is exactly what is meant by focusing on the end rather than clinging to the means.

'When you are liberated from the body-mind sense, so that you are not the body-mind, that itself is liberation.' The crucial thing is to get rid of our false identification with the psychophysical being and realize our higher dimension. Maharaj is very particular that the goal must be very clear and that constant awareness of our higher nature is the way.

The book is interspersed with photographs of Maharaj and this adds to the authenticity of the dia-

logues. His simple language and steady flow of ideas inspire even the casual reader and stir something up deep within. The glossary of Sanskrit terms given at the end will help the Western reader. It would have been better if a brief life sketch of Maharaj were included. The clear, bold typeface is reader-friendly and the book will go a long way in helping aspirants irrespective of their upbringing and religion. The universality of the dialogues will appeal to one and all. Coming from the reputed publishing house, Motilal Banarsidass, the book will certainly reach all parts of the globe.

Swami Atmajnananda

Editor, *Viveka Prabha*  
Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore

### **Enriching the Life. Dr Harish Chandra.**

Om Shantidhama, 3371, 13th Cross, 2nd Main, Shastrinagar, Bangalore 560 028.  
E-mail: [shntidhm@bgl.vsnl.net.in](mailto:shntidhm@bgl.vsnl.net.in). 2002. ix + 103 pp. Rs 60.

This book lives up to its enticing title, dealing as it does with subtle matters relating to our intellectual, moral and spiritual life. A combustion scientist by profession, Dr Harish Chandra seems to have been on the quest for an 'enriching life' since his early days. His journey took him to the teachings of the Vedas. It also led him to found the Dayananda Institute of Vedic Studies, the fundamental objective of which is to present the wisdom of the Vedas to intellectuals and decision makers.

The author neatly arranges his ideas in five chapters. The first of them is introductory in nature and discusses the concept of enrichment. In the process, it grapples with certain fundamental philosophical questions: Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? The author's answers to all these questions are drawn from traditional Indian lore—the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas. The reader gets a glimpse of the holistic outlook of the ancient seers which holds the promise of greater inner fulfilment.

The second chapter, 'Understanding the Self', analyses the complex human personality. It demonstrates how humans are a composite of body, mind and soul. The description of the five *jñanendriyas*, or organs of knowledge, and the five *karmendriyas*, or organs of action, that one finds here is based on Kapila's Sankhya philosophy.

The trinity of Ishvara, jiva and jagat forms the

subject matter of the third chapter, 'Understanding the World'. Also discussed in this chapter are a whole lot of issues concerning man's harmonious relationship with the surrounding world.

The Veda commands us to 'Become men; *manur-bhava*.' How do we become ideal human beings? By understanding who we really are, says the fourth chapter, 'Understanding Human Potentialities'. According to the author, the practice of Upanishadic upasanas and self-surrender to the Divine Will are effective means of unlocking our potential and thereby growing to our true, full stature.

The last chapter is aptly titled 'The Inward Journey'. Our quest for fulfilment ends when we attain God-realization or Self-realization. Vedanta says that our real Self is hidden within five *koshas*, or sheaths. Spiritual practice is nothing but the effort to penetrate these enveloping layers and reach the Self. After giving a brief description of the *panchakoshas* the author takes up the practical side of sadhana—physical exercises, mental relaxation techniques and meditation—paying special attention to the various types of pranayama.

Dr Harish Chandra is a successful speaker. *Enriching the Life* gives the reader the essence of his talks in an easy and readable style.

Santosh Kumar Sharma  
Kharagpur

### **A Catalogue of Vaishnava Literature.**

Charles S J White. Motilal Banarsidass.  
2004. xii+205 pp. Rs 495.

This book is a product of the 'Vaishnava Literature Conservation (Matsya) Project' that undertook microfilming of rare books and manuscripts of the Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha and Gaudiya traditions, as well as texts of related interests, available with institutions and individuals primarily in South India and at Vrindaban in the early 1980s. The catalogued microfilms are now available with the Adyar, Bodleian, and American University libraries.

A total of 1,679 entries (including texts ranging from Dvaita commentaries on the Upanishads to Nimbarkacharya's *Sri Krishna Stavara* and Vrindavan Das's *Yugala Sanaha Patrika*) make up this catalogue. This bibliographic rescue should prove invaluable for researchers and lovers of the Vaishnava literature and tradition.

PB

## Reports

### New Centre

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Cuddapah**, is a new centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Till recently the Math was a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, 5/475-6 Trunk Road, Cuddapah, Andhra Pradesh 516 001 (Phone: 08562-241633). Swami Atmavidananda has been appointed head of the centre.



*Swamis Smarananandaji, Atmavidanandaji and Gautamanandaji (l-r) at the new premises of Ramakrishna Mission, Cuddapah*

The history of the centre goes back to 1910, when a devout Sufi gentleman, Khan Bahadur Manjumiah, donated his land and house on Trunk Road to Ramakrishna Math, Madras. Later, the place was sanctified by Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, the second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, who during one of his South Indian sojourns spent some days there in meditation. Last year it was amalgamated with the Ramakrishna Math. The centre has been conducting daily prayer and worship and running a public library and a weekly medical dispensary.

In order to benefit the Rayalaseema area,

a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has also been started on a 10-acre piece of land graciously allotted by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. It is located in the satellite township that is coming up in the Putlampalle area on the outskirts of Cuddapah.

### News from Headquarters

The **West Bengal State Legislative Assembly, Kolkata**, was witness to a happy event on 3 August 2005. A portrait of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was unveiled in its lobby by Sri Prabodh Chandra Sinha, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. Thus, one whose life was veiled in silence has been honoured in the halls of power.

The portraits of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had been installed at the Assembly long back, and the installation of Holy Mother's picture only proves her growing presence and relevance in our social life.



*Unveiling Sri Sarada Devi's portrait at the West Bengal Legislative Assembly*

It was Sri Tarak Bandyopadhyay, MLA, who took the initiative in bringing Holy Mother to the Legislative Assembly. A budding artist, Sri Arya Chandra Choudhury, was commissioned to paint the portrait on canvas according to Vidhan Sabha specifica-

tions, and his work has won unanimous praise.

The members of the ruling Communist Party and the Opposition along with the entire staff, with their different religious and cultural backgrounds, joined the monks of Ramakrishna Math and nuns of Sarada Math at the brief but intense unveiling ceremony.

The Speaker, Mr Hasim Abdul Halim, welcomed everybody and spoke on the significance of the event. Sri Prabodh Chandra Sinha dwelt on Holy Mother's role in the history of the land, her growing presence and humanity's growing need for her teachings. Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, highlighted Mother's universality, and Swami Prabhanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, elaborated on her role in the all-round rejuvenation of the national life. Sri Pankaj Banerjee, a member of the Opposition, stressed the importance of emulating Holy Mother's great life.

Sri Sinha then formally unveiled Holy Mother's portrait amidst great cheer.

Two students of **Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math**, were awarded gold medals for standing first at the all-India Uttara Madhyama (Higher Secondary) examinations conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, in 2003 and 2004.

### News from Branch Centres

Janab Ahmad Hasan, Uttar Pradesh Minister for Family Welfare, visited Vivekananda Polyclinic, Lucknow, on 27 July and commissioned its newly installed blood component separation unit.

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built monks' quarters, students' home, dining hall, library and seminar hall at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol**, on 8 and 9 August.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maha-

raj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed swimming pool and kitchen block at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Deoghar**, on 11 August.

Swami Smarananandaji laid the foundation stone for the proposed monks' quarters at the **Cuddapah** centre's new site on 26 August (Krishna Janmashtami). The ceremony was attended by Sri Ashok Kumar, District Collector, and Sri Vivekananda Reddy, MP.

Most Revered President Maharaj inaugurated the newly built kitchen, dining hall and monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong**, on 28 August.

Two students of the **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Saradapitha, Belur**, who stood first in the BA (Sanskrit honours) and Bsc (Mathematics honours) examinations held by Calcutta University this year also secured the top positions in the entire Humanities (honours) and Science (honours) groups.

The degree college run by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, has started offering postgraduate courses in Chemistry from this year.

### Foreign News

As part of the celebrations of its platinum jubilee, **Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago**, held a conference on 'Vedanta for the Global Village' at the Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat in Ganges, Michigan, from 24 to 26 June. Thirteen swamis of the Ramakrishna Order and over 350 devotees participated in the 3-day event. Swami Prameyanandaji, Treasurer, Ramakrishna Mission, was the chief guest.

Sri Natwar Singh, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India, visited **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka**, on 7 August.

### Relief and Rehabilitation

In the wake of the floods caused by unprecedented rainfall in western Maharashtra,

our centres in Mumbai and Pune conducted relief operations in the affected areas in August.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai**, distributed 13,654 kg rice, 3,467 kg dal, 1,300 kg sugar, 1,250 kg edible oil and 3,000 relief kits (each containing 2 plastic mats, 2 towels, 1 sari and 1 blanket) to 3,000 families of Khar (Mumbai) and 24 other villages in Thane district. The centre also provided medical relief to flood victims suffering from gastro-enteritis, dengue, leptospirosis and malaria.

**Ramakrishna Math, Pune**, distributed 31,500 kg rice, 28,500 kg wheat, 2,850 kg dal, 950 kg edible oil, 1,900 kg onions, 1,900 kg potatoes, 4,312 kg rice flakes, 2,156 relief packets (including 2 kg *poha*, 1 biscuit packet, 500 g *chanachur*, 250 g bread, 6 bananas, salt, chilli powder, 6 candles and a matchbox), 4,000 water pouches, 4,700 saris, 5,000 chadars, 6,400 blankets, 600 plastic mats and 850 tarpaulin sheets among 36,978 beneficiaries of 48 villages in Kolhapur, Raigarh, Ratnagiri, Sangli and Satara districts.

In Gujarat, **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara**, distributed 281 sets of utensils (each set consisting of 4 cooking vessels, 4 plates, 4 bowls, 2 tumblers, 1 spoon, 1 griddle and 1 spatula), 8,851 blan-

kets and 330 tarpaulin sheets.

Two housing projects taken up by the Batticaloa sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, in aid of tsunami victims are



*Swami Jivananandaji with a group of visitors at the site of the Batticaloa housing project*

progressing well despite being funded solely by individual donors.

In August, **Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady**, distributed 34 catamarans among 68 families of Edamanakkad village in Ernakulam district.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair**, gave 504 shirts, 50 blankets and 30 bed sheets to tsunami victims at different places in and around Port Blair. \*

## An Appeal

Since the **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute** (a deemed university) has chosen to concentrate on areas meant to directly benefit underprivileged, deprived, rural and tribal people, besides imparting value education to the public in general (particularly teachers and guardians, in addition to college and university students), the courses run by it are far from being 'economically viable'. Although the university has sought some funds from the central government, it certainly needs the patronage and financial support of all those who are devoted to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology as well as of those who are deeply concerned about sociological problems like erosion of values. The generous public are earnestly requested to help us in however small a way. Donations may be addressed directly to: General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, PO Belur Math, Dt Howrah 711 202, West Bengal, India, with a cover note specifying that it is meant for the deemed university. Cheques and drafts should be drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math'. All donations are exempt from income tax under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act.